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GOETHE: THE MAN AND THE MYTH*

"If we survey Goethe's personality as a whole," wrote Georg Witkowski some fifty years ago, "it would appear that Nature for once had tried to show what humanity was capable of at the highest stage of development and had deliberately produced this man under the most favorable conditions imaginable." And while he goes on to qualify the statement somewhat he lets it stand and we are entitled to quote it as a typical illustration of the idealized view of Goethe which has established itself so strongly among his German interpreters and, for that matter, among interpreters and readers everywhere—a view which presents him as a man different from other men, the darling of the gods, or even a god or a demi-god himself. "It seems," wrote Hermann Grimm in 1880, "as if Providence had placed him in the simplest circumstances in order that nothing should impede his perfect unfolding." Quotations to the same effect could be multiplied among the Goethe biographers of the nineteenth century and they will also be found still lingering in the twentieth.

Exactly when this view of Goethe—the Goethe myth or legend, we might call it—began to be formed might be hard to say. But we can see the beginnings of it in his lifetime. Not perhaps in his early life, though he had his passionate admirers then, but certainly in his late. Two books which appeared in quick succession shortly after his death, both commemorating his personality at first hand, reflect this tendency clearly and may be said to have established it in print. One is Bettina Brentano's ecstatic, almost idolatrous, *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835), a volume of largely, but not wholly, invented correspondence chiefly between herself and Goethe which constitutes a feat of sustained rapture not easy to parallel even in the

* Abridged from the original paper presented at the University of Mississippi as part of their Centennial Lecture Series.

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annals of German romanticism. "I am a born temple-worshipper," writes Bettina, "where the breath of the sanctuary does not reach me, I am unsure of myself and like one that is lost. You are my temple." And again she writes: "The spirit is born to worship." This is the mood in which she writes her whole book. If in one place she says that she will forswear her idolatry—*Ach, ich will dem Götzendienst abschwören!*—it is only because she feels that her case is made, "for," she says, "which of the prophets denies that you are a god?" Her intention to devote the proceeds of the book to the building of a gigantic Goethe monument was never fully executed. Perhaps fortunately. But the book remains in all its fervor and devotion.

Discreeter in its idealization is the second book, the even more famous *Eckermann,* which began to appear the year after (1836). This is the book that Nietzsche with characteristic but pardonable excess described as the best in the language—*das beste deutsche Buch das es giebt*—and it is as much alive and as impressive today as ever. But how many of those who derive their conception of Goethe from these fascinating pages realize how subtly the Eckermann portrait is stylized, how consistently the raciness and the roughness of Goethe, which we know enough about from other quarters, has been toned down and a gentler, serener, more seraphic, note substituted? Ernst Beutler in his recent account of the book recognizes Eckermann's deliberate intention to weave a myth about Goethe, to translate everything from the mundane level of Weimar to some "Arcadian landscape of the spirit," and so to make a sort of seer or Merlin of him. "We talked," says Eckermann, "of great and good things, he turned the noblest part of his nature towards me and my spirit took fire from his." This is many degrees cooler than Bettina, but the idealization is there. When in his closing paragraph Eckermann contemplates Goethe's dead body laid out for burial he sees what some of the late portraits scarcely show—a perfect man in all his beauty —*Ein vollkommener Mensch lag in grosser Schönheit vor mir.*

On the whole the Germans have yielded to this mythologizing of Goethe more than they have resisted it, as we can see from the responses of Heine who by the whole trend of his talents and associations belonged to the opposition yet admitted ironically that when he visited Goethe in Weimar he could not help glancing aside to see whether he had Jupiter's eagle beside him with lightning in its beak.

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The Goethe who was loved and hated in the Heine period—roughly the period preceding 1848—was already the idealized Goethe, the Goethe who was above the battle, surveying our mortal agony from the clouds. Here we touch one of the dubious aspects of the myth. There is only one type of artist who can stay in the clouds or inhabit Olympus; it is the type that separates art from life and withdraws from his fellow men. "Goethe's words," says Heine in one of the wrongest things ever said about him, "are childless, such being the curse that descends on everything that is made by art alone." His Goethe, we see, is the artist Goethe, the Goethe of the *"Kunstperiode,"* as he called it. This may not be exactly what the Germans mean when they call Goethe a Classic or the age he lived in Classical—they are probably just following the French—but it is only too easy to pass from the one set of terms to the other. "Classical," "Olympian," "art for art's sake"—the idea of perfection is present in each.

The phenomenon is not restricted to Germany. Strich's recently published *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* (1946) shows how strongly the Olympian or Parnassian view of Goethe took hold in other countries. No less a critic than Sainte-Beuve adopted it, taking his cue from Bettina's book, which he reviewed in 1850 in French translation, and presenting Goethe as serene and marble-browed and, even in his *Werther period,* a high-priest of art. In an off moment he compares him for impassivity with Fontenelle. On the whole the French tradition seems to have followed him and not the French tradition alone. "If we look about in the Europe of that time," says Strich, "the picture of the Olympian Goethe crops up on every hand." English criticism of him may have contributed less to the building-up of the myth than French or German, but Carlyle, the hero-worshipper, cannot be wholly exonerated.

In the annals of English literature proper there is no corresponding case. There is no English author who has been similarly enthroned or elevated. Shakespeare as a person eludes us; Milton and Wordsworth are possibly too vulnerable in their private lives; Boswell's *Johnson,* the nearest English counterpart of Eckermann's *Goethe,* is not chargeable with Eckermann's bias. The question naturally arises how useful, how desirable the Goethe myth is. That it produces and always has produced reaction will not be doubted. In recent years there is the notable case of Thomas Mann, whose Goethe novel *Lotte*

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in Weimar (1939) is something for every student of Goethe to ponder. Here Goethe is subjected to the severest close-up he has ever been given; the all-but-impossibility of living in his vicinity, whether as his son or his secretary or his neighbor, is argued implicitly on almost every page; the unideal aspects of his person, say in the bath-tub or at the dining-table, are unsparingly accentuated; and yet by letting Goethe soliloquize for the best part of a long chapter —the seventh—the author restores him to his full stature and, for some readers at least, writes a constructive piece of Goethe criticism. The myth is shattered, but the man remains.

Turning back in this spirit to the more traditional critics, we may ask what grounds they had for suggesting that Goethe was "nurtured under the most favorable circumstances imaginable" or that there was nothing in his environment to impede "his perfect unfolding." The Germany of 1749, the year of Goethe's birth, was more of a hinterland to Europe than a cultural part of it. It had produced great music, but the world was slow to respond and Germany remained an obscure country. Those who took the grand tour left it severely alone and headed south. Frankfurt, where Goethe was born and bred, had its archaic charms and its festive moments, but it was quite without the intellectual ferment of a great city and was scarcely a good breeding-ground for poets. Goethe wrote to his mother from Weimar in 1781, when he was over thirty and had been away from Frankfurt for six years or so, that if he had stayed there the disparity between its confined and sluggish life and the speed and scope of his mind would have either driven him mad or kept him in a perpetual childhood. As for the Goethe household, who would choose to grow up in it? His father who at the start was the only adult in the house, his mother being eighteen when our Goethe was born and closer in years to him than to her husband, was a gloomy and disappointed man who lived in self-imposed isolation after failing to be elected a city councillor. In a house so dominated the atmosphere must have been oppressive and we know from private letters that Goethe found it so. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* where all such matters are passed over comparatively lightly, Goethe confesses that his father's temperament lay on him like a burden.

To go through Goethe's long life in this fashion looking for trouble would be laborious and there is no need to do it. Enough has

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been said to indicate that from the start his life was no more favored than that of many others we could name in the literary field, and that we cannot treat him as the product of ideal conditions without grossly falsifying the picture. Even his advantages were not as smooth as they seemed. Not the least of these was that he was always in prosperous circumstances. Prosperity, if not wealth, had produced a frustrated father, and something of the uprootedness or lack of direction from which he suffered seems to have been handed on to the son. Goethe, it is true, graduated in law but did so without much effort and without much effect, playing at law rather than practicing it, and for the most part leading a life of extravagant dilettantism, dangerous for any young man and especially so for one of Goethe's excitability. The extraordinary beauty of *Werther* and the early *Faust* —the two most impressive pieces of poetic creation that grew out of a welter of aimless writing in these early years—should not blind us to their explosive and almost pathological nature. Neither of these works came out of an ideal environment. Goethe's sudden change of abode from Frankfurt to the Weimar court at the age of twenty-six which proved in the long run to be the saving of him, was at the time as disconcerting a plunge as any. And even here where his life slowly began to gather weight and size till at his death he dominated European letters, what are we to say of the attendant circumstances? Weimar, his home for more than fifty years, was an unimpressive little duchy, which at the time of his arrival was just being taken over by a boy of twenty-one—not a propitious omen—and which recommended itself chiefly because the dowager-duchess, Anna Amalia, had a taste for letters and had begun to collect authors. Her son in adding Goethe to the collection and pitchforking him into his Privy Council within the year was merely behaving like the youthful ruler that he was. If it looks like a supreme stroke of enlightened statesmanship now, that is only because we insist on reading the future into the past.

No matter what our thoughts about myths in general, there are two great and compelling reasons—both of them specifically related to his case—for distrusting the myth of Goethe and preferring Goethe the man. First, his life and works are extraordinarily well documented. If we cannot claim to possess everything that he wrote we can be sure of having the great bulk of it, thanks initially to the care he took

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himself with his own papers and second to the labor of German scholars after the Goethe materials became accessible in the eighteen-eighties. The great Weimar edition, which is still the only one that aims at completeness, consists of one hundred and thirty-three volumes —a mammoth performance. Not only this but we have the collected record of those who met and conversed with him. Goethe was a European celebrity for more than a generation and most of those who had any conversation with him thought it worth while to set down what they remembered. The result is like an additional section to the works and in the New Artemis edition now being published in Zurich is being so treated. In all history few lives can have been so fully recorded. No life, perhaps, of comparable range and significance, unless Voltaire's.

There are gaps in the record, but they go almost unnoticed in the wealth of what is preserved. It so happens that Goethe realized betimes that the details of his life were worth keeping and any account of him must rely heavily on his autobiographical writings, which in one way and another cover all but one extended portion of his career. All in all it is possible to relive Goethe's life with him to an almost unbelievable extent. In his Frankfurt letters we have so naked and unguarded a revelation of a young man's mind in all its caprice and uncertainty that after we have familiarized ourselves with them—preferably in their original spelling and punctuation or rather lack of the same—we feel that we are living inside him and know what it was to be like that. In his first ten years in Weimar we can repeat the experience, more especially with the help of the upwards of fifteen hundred letters that he wrote to Charlotte von Stein. For his later years the intimacy may be less, but the information is greater. There is no period of his adult life that is not accessible to us week by week and even day by day. As Karl Jaspers says in his *Unsere Zukunft und Goethe* (1948) Goethe stands so vividly before us that it is as if we had known him personally in every phase of his life.

While readers have not been wanting who deplored the existence of this mass of biographical data and preferred to read the works by themselves, as we read Homer, it is more profitable to take the constructive view. Rightly used, the biography can serve as a wonderful extension of our literary experience. In dealing with Goethe's poetry, and his creative writings as a whole, we find that we not only have the

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finished works, as with any other author, but that we also have the works in the making and can watch them grow. This can be done in spots with others, but with Goethe we can do it right and left and to an extent that one would not have thought possible. Even those who specialize in the study of Goethe only slowly realize what an unusual opportunity they have. Take for instance *Torquato Tasso,* one of Goethe's greatest works and unsurpassed as a study of the poetic temperament at odds with life. On the one hand it is quite self-explanatory; it can be read without commentary and the reader is free to stop at that if he chooses. But thanks to our knowledge of Goethe's life in his thirties, when his mind was torn between dreams and duties and this poem was germinating, we can enter so fully into its origins that we are enabled to float ourselves, as it were, into its creative current and recapture it in process of formation. There are moments, long waited for, when it is as if one shared in the writing.

This double approach to Goethe's poetry—from the inside and from the outside—can be made in varying degrees with all his greater works, both long and short. His lyrical poems lend themselves to it in infinite variety. Little masterpieces like *"Harzreise im Winter"* and *"An den Mond"* can be restored to the living environment they came from and recreated every time we read them. The famous lines:

Füllest wieder Busch und Thal
Still mit Nebelglanz
Lösest endlich auch einmal
Meine Seele ganz

become almost as rich in association for us as they were for him. The enhancement of our understanding of poetry is such that after Goethe we read all poetry differently.

But this intimate sharing of Goethe's mind is quite incompatible with the mythical view of him or with any unrealistic view whatever. Far from finding him an ideal or Olympian poet, we find him strangely compounded of weak and strong—a poet who, for instance, was unable to say when he would begin or, having begun, when he would finish, with the result that his pages are littered with fragments and failures like an untended forest in which one tree prospers where three decay. There is a sense in which as a poet he lacked will-power and was at the mercy of his mood or his milieu, so that we might

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be tempted to call him the victim of his poetry rather than the master of it, in the sense in which Racine or Shakespeare or even Schiller were masters. It was not poetic virtue that kept him from completing *Faust* for nearly sixty years, but something much more fallible and human. And while in this case, and in others, he turned his weakness into strength and by waiting got a quality into his work that other poets seldom get, this does not entitle us to idealize him or to see him as other than he plainly was. On the contrary, by idealizing him we are simply putting a barrier between ourselves and our golden opportunity and shutting off all or part of the rich reality.

But the stronger reason for distrusting the Goethe myth is that it has the whole of his life-philosophy—all that he learned and all that he taught—against it. He pre-eminently is the moral exponent of trial and error, of finding the right road by taking the wrong. This is what happens to Wilhelm Meister—in a novel that Goethe worked at on and off for half a century—and it is what happens more signally to Faust, who, while moving towards a great and worthy goal, blunders grossly and never learns not to blunder. When Goethe wrote the famous line:

Es irrt der Mensch solang er strebt

which means that, try as he may, man will never eliminate error unless by sheer inertia which is worse than error, he was not excluding himself and warning others but was speaking right out of his bitter experience. Consider how frequently this essentially autobiographical poet creates weak characters rather than strong, especially when they are men and the link with himself is close. Faust may be an exception for, whether we call him a strong character or not, we can agree that there was something strong in him that continually reasserted itself and ultimately carried him through. But think of the gallery of weaklings: Weislingen, the turncoat and libertine, in *Götz von Berlichingen;* Werther, the sentimentalist, whose strongest act is to shoot himself; Egmont, the dreamer, who ineptly and blindly throws away his life where a shrewder mind would have survived, or rather did survive; Tasso, whose sensibilities are so overwrought that it is an open question whether he will collapse or not; Eduard in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* whose self-indulgence condemns him; and, to cap the list, Goethe himself in his *"Trilogie der Leidenschaft"* reduced by

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his emotions to a state of Wertherism almost equal to that of fifty years before. In the face of such evidence the Olympian interpretation becomes untenable. It is only by recognizing a persistent vulnerability or even inadequacy in the author that we can make sense of all this and learn from it, as he did. Treat him as a god, and it makes nonsense of his life and record.

If, having disposed of the myth, we concentrate on the man and ask what manner of man he was, the logical answer might be that each must find out very slowly for himself. But this is discouraging, and a less evasive answer can be attempted. First, he was a man with an unusually rich play of emotional life, which never came to quiescence with the lapse of years but, as already indicated, remained active in him even in old age. We have abundant evidence of this from the reports of contemporaries, but the proof is in the lyrical poetry that he wrote. In Goethe the lyrical impulse never died but remained with him, or revisited him, to the end of his days, not as the game or exercise that lyrical poetry can become in the hands of a technician, but as the urgent pressure of feeling hard or impossible to control. In a moving little poem written when he was about twenty he seems to recognize at the beginning that for him the emotional journey will not be short, because he says:

Dies wird die letzte Trän' nicht sein,
Die glühend herzauf quillet.

To single out a few milestones on the long road, Goethe at twenty-six wrote the poem *"Herbstgefühl,"* consummate in its vein of opulent melancholy; in his middle thirties he wrote *"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,"* a poem never exceeded by himself or anyone in lyrical intensity; at forty-seven he wrote the great lyric that stands retrospectively at the head of *Faust "Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten";* ten years later, in his middle or late fifties, came the poignant lines of Epimeleia in his *Pandora* fragment:

"Ach, warum, ihr Götter, ist unendlich
Alles, alles, endlich unser Glück nur";

at sixty-five in a great revival of lyricism he wrote the poem *"Selige Sehnsucht,"* surpassing himself, if that were possible; at seventy-four the "Marienbad Elegy" with its despair and its struggle with des-

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pair; at seventy-eight the lovely lines, *"Dämmerung senkte sich von oben";* and at seventy-nine the little group of Dornburg poems, including *"Um Mitternacht—ich schlief, im Busen wachte."* We know too, though we cannot specify with certainty, that some of the wonderful lyricism at the close of *Faust* was written later still when he was over eighty.

This little sequence does nothing to suggest the range of Goethe's verses, but simply shows the persistence in him of the initial impulse —the lyrical cry—which normally is the first thing to go as a poet ages. This in itself, quite apart from the intrinsic merit of the lines, makes him unique or nearly so. Is there any poet, or composer either, who retained this passionateness at this pitch for this length of time? We do not know what quartets Beethoven might have written if he had lived as long as Goethe, because he died at fifty-seven, exactly a generation younger. Wordsworth, another contemporary, wrote nothing in late life to match his early inspiration.

The relation of this phase of Goethe to the rest of him has not always been well understood. His interpreters have relied heavily, perhaps too heavily, on the well-known passage in his autobiography where he tells us that by converting an inner disturbance into poetry he calmed himself and adjusted his outlook, which may be true and important in its degree but is not on that account to be taken as a key to his life. If Goethe had been able to surmount all his difficulties creatively—and selfishly, as Kierkegaard claimed—by simply turning them into poetry, his life would have been very different from what it was, and very much easier. But the creative impulse is not as docile as that even in one so rich in it as he. It is enough to note that the two constructive turning-points or crises in his life, his break with Frankfurt and departure for Weimar in 1775 and his sojourn in Italy in 1786-88, had little or nothing to do with his creativeness. In Weimar it was the change of environment that helped him, not, so far as we can judge, his release as a poet, since, if anything, his creative life was retarded by the change. While in the two years before leaving Frankfurt he wrote both *Werther* and the Gretchen tragedy, he waited four years in Weimar before writing *Iphigenie.* As for the second crisis, his creative activity in Italy was almost entirely restricted to the secondary task of revising and completing older works; there is no evidence that he leaned on the poetic gift to round this crucial corner.

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After Italy his productiveness was reduced and remained so for a period of years. The argument that Goethe managed his life as a whole by means of poetry is demonstrably wrong. Poetry was one of his resources, a major resource, but not the only one.

What makes him so significant is precisely that his days were not rounded and fulfilled in song, as in view of the continuance of his poetic gift they well might have been, but that he had also in equal measure and in equal strength the philosophical impulse to understand life and to regulate it. No one not possessed of this impulse could have conceived the great *Faust* monologue, written at the age of twenty-five or thereabouts, in which the passion for final knowledge compels Faust to leave the beaten track and to strike out a path for himself in the hope of discovering what it is that holds the world together. The persistence of this impulse in Goethe could be demonstrated stage by stage like the persistence in him of the lyrical cry. The little *Philosophische Studie* that he wrote at thirty-five is perhaps the first clear indication of his power to formulate his thoughts in the abstract; another landmark is the essay on experimentation that he wrote at forty-three. Either of these might serve as proof of his philosophical independence. But if something more extended is needed there is his almost lifelong concern with science, more especially with organic science, which grew out of or along with his philosophical impulse and was guided by it throughout. It was chiefly, though not wholly, in the course of his scientific studies that his philosophical thought developed and this gives them an importance not always recognized by earlier critics, though fully recognized now.

This is not the place to expound or to assess his philosophy. Suffice it to say that, being deeply rooted in his scientific studies, it partakes of their character and revolves about nature and natural law, as he understood the terms. It is not in every respect close to today, but it is and remains important because he held it, or rather because he held it with such tact and subtlety and variety of observation. We should have to value it, if only for the wealth of maxims and reflections that it threw off. Here are a few samples to set beside the lyrics and to show something of the quality of his reflective mind:

A note on causality: A great mistake that we make is to think that the cause is always close to the effect, like the bowstring to the arrow that

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it shoots. Yet we cannot avoid the mistake, because we always have the two associated in our minds and so bring them together.

A note on research: We have to believe that the incomprehensible is comprehensible; otherwise we should stop searching.

A note on originality: To equate ourselves with objects *in extenso* is to learn; to grasp them in depth is to create.

A note on theory and practice: The false has the advantage that you can always gossip about it; the truth has to be acted on at once or it isn't there.

A note on science: Knowledge consists in recognizing what to distinguish; science consists in recognizing what not to distinguish.

A note on the transmigration of souls: The fairest metempsychosis is when we see ourselves emerge in another.

A note on society: Intelligent people are always the best cyclopaedias.

Finally a note for students: Strictly speaking we only know when we know little; doubt grows with knowledge.

It will be evident from the nature of these aphorisms, of which we have hundreds in prose and verse, that if we approach Goethe intellectually we find in him the same tentative humanity that we find in his poetry. These are not the utterances of a deity but of one like ourselves who is feeling his way and sensing his shortcomings. To mythologize at this point would be absurd. But it is not the purpose of this essay to make Goethe out to be less than he was. When we asked what rivals he had in lyrical poetry, for power and duration together, names at least came to mind. But if we ask now what others have enjoyed both the poetic and the philosophical gifts—or, what amounts to the same thing in his case, the lyrical and the scientific—and again at this pitch and for this length of time, the names are fewer. There are questions that it is useful to ask and not answer and this may be one of them, history being not a contest but a process and Goethe part of the process. It is enough to say that when we ask the question we begin to realize why in 1949 we have a bicentenary to celebrate.

What is more profitable to observe is the way in which Goethe's two main activities interact with one another, the poetic modifying the scientific and the scientific the poetic. The interaction was facilitated in his case because making poetry was not for him the separate faculty that it sometimes seems to be but was simply an extension of the general experience that he brought to bear on everything he did,

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and so on his science. His science in its turn drew his lyricism into objective channels and led to the wealth of philosophical verse that crowned his late life. As Günther Müller puts it in his *Kleine Goethe-biographie* (1947)—the first life of Goethe to place this emphasis—there was no compulsion exerted by the one on the other, the poet brought life into the science, the scientist brought law into the poetry. He reminds us also that in effecting single-handed this reunion of science and poetry Goethe was recovering for civilization what it lost two thousand years ago with the decline of antiquity. Whether this claim is absolutely justified or only partially, it accords wonderfully with the temper of Goethe's late verses where, though the voice that speaks is modern, the tradition in which it speaks seems to be that of the early world. Take the group of poems called *"Gott und Welt"* or the sequence called *"Urworte, Orphisch,"* or, better still, one or other of his nameless little snatches of philosophy in rhyme, which are at once so disarmingly easy and so endlessly suggestive and which he alone in modern times was able to write.

Here we seem to be reaching a terminus, but there is yet a word to say. If Goethe's life was not centered in poetry, neither was it centered in science, but in something that belonged to both and brought the two together. To say that this something was philosophy is right enough, as far as it goes, but is nevertheless not adequate. For while it could be argued that Goethe was a true philosopher, just as true a philosopher, whether in psychology or metaphysics, as his contemporary Kant, or if less so, then only in the sense that he was not willing to fix his thoughts in a system but preferred to keep them fluid, the contrast between them in their personal relation to philosophy is so great that we have to start differentiating as soon as we compare. Kant philosophized out of what must have been, or rather notoriously was, a well-regulated life; his conduct of himself did not, so far as we can judge, interfere with his reflective vocation; personal questions did not impinge on abstract. In this he was not unlike our current conception of a philosopher. But Goethe was different, more nervous, more problematic, more modern, closer inwardly to Rousseau or to Nietzsche. In all his eighty years his life never came to equilibrium, but continually pestered him and drove him through unrest to do the things he did. We have only to read the letters that he wrote up to the age of forty to see how true this was of the first half of his life, and

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for the second there is no lack of indications under the surface. This, as he saw himself, was part of the price he paid for remaining a lyrical poet.

It can only have been because he was constituted in this way—under the necessity, it would almost seem, of correcting his own life from day to day or even from minute to minute—that the problem of living so permeates his work, giving it its specifically Goethean character. The omnipresence of this elementary problem—the problem of managing life and directing it—may not reveal itself to a casual glance, but the experienced reader knows that it is there, not only in the obvious places, such as *Faust* where it comes out on a titanic scale or *Torquato Tasso* where it is refined upon or *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* where it is modernized, but everywhere, even in places where it does not show. The conclusion must be that the basic state of disturbance which prompts highly endowed individuals to moralize or to philosophize or to create in one of the arts was more than usually acute in Goethe and more than usually persistent. It is here at the pre-philosophical level rather than in philosophy proper that we must look for the center or focus which initiated and interrelated everything. A difficult thought and yet a simple one, like so much of Goethe, who is himself both simple and difficult. It is here too that we must seek the clue to the influence he acquires over his readers. There is no other word that fits, though we do not customarily speak of an author as influencing us. What happens is that the intimate relation in him between living and writing transfers itself to us as an intimate relation between living and reading. This is not the way we read Homer or Shakespeare. The impact of *King Lear* and the twenty-fourth book of *The Iliad* is greater. But if we ask, in conclusion, which of the three has the power to change men from what they were and make them different, the answer must be Goethe, who alone among very great writers puts himself in this direct personal contact with those who yield to him.

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Saul Bellow

FROM THE LIFE OF AUGIE MARCH*

I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that sombre city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent. But a man's character is his fate, says Heraclitus, and in the end there isn't any way to disguise the nature of the knocks by acoustic work on the door or gloving the knuckles. I'm curious myself to know what kind of knocks will come when I set up a bid. I dislike the stickiness of guile you find even in the best intentioned records of lives. And everybody knows there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression; if you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining. On the other hand, to invite all knocks is a great gamble. You never can tell but what some muscle strengthened grossly by unconscious bad habits and vices may deliver the kind of knock that brings the door down and tears a hole in the side of the house, a much more dangerous kind of knock than the theosophist ones invited by the evening seance, for those are presumably of another world, presumably from over the border of death, by spirits and souls that have passed intact into the host of chatty spooks. But these living knocks may bring to the front something less than comforting, so it's a daring decision to say, "Okay, slam away, I'm ready." But that elementary confidence. Man! it isn't too much to ask of myself at the age of forty, or near it. A whole lot less than asking the Seraphim of Isaiah to unveil their eyes before the awful presence. Only a willingness to entertain these knocks.

My own parents were not much to me, though I cared for my mother. She was simple-minded and what I learned from her was

* This is the first chapter of a novel entitled "Life Among the Machiavellians."

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not what she taught, but on the order of object-lessons. She didn't have much to teach, poor woman. My brothers and I loved her. I speak for them both; for the elder it is safe enough; for the younger one, Georgie, I have to answer—he was born an idiot—but I'm in no need to guess, for he had a song he sang as he ran drag-footed with his stiff idiot's trot, up and down along the curl-wired fence in the backyard

Georgie Mahchy, Augie, Simey
Winnie Mahchy, evwy, evwy love mama.

He was right about everyone save Winnie, Grandma Lausch's poodle, a pursy old overfed poodle. Mama was her servant, as she was Grandma Lausch's. Loud-breathing and windbreaking, she lay near the old lady's stool on a cushion embroidered with a Berber, a rifle, and a Numidian lion yawning with rage at the Berber's rifle. She was personally grandma's, belonged to her suite; the rest of us were the governed, and especially mama. Mama passed the dog's dish to Grandma, and Winnie received her food at the old lady's feet from the old lady's hands. These hands and feet were small; she wore a shrivelled sort of lisle on her legs and her slippers were gray—ah, the gray of that felt, the gray despotic to souls—with pink ribbons. Mama, however, had large feet and, around the house she wore men's shoes, usually without strings, and a dusting or mobcap like somebody's fanciful cotton effigy of the form of the brain. She was meek and long, round-eyed like Danny—gentle green round eyes and a gentle freshness of color in her long face. Her hands were work-reddened, she had very few of her teeth left—to heed the knocks as they come—and she and Simon wore the same ravelly coat-sweaters. Besides having round eyes, Mama had circular glasses that I went with her to the free dispensary on Harrison Street to get. Coached by Grandma Lausch, I went to do the lying. Now I know it wasn't so necessary to lie, but then everyone thought so, and Grandma Lausch especially, who was one of those Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood that my young years were full of. So Grandma, who had it all ready before we left the house and must have put in hours laying it out in thought and phrase, lying small in her chilly small room under the feather-bed, gave it to me at breakfast. The idea was that Mama wasn't keen enough to do it right. That maybe one didn't need to be keen didn't

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occur to us; it was a contest. The dispensary would want to know why the Charities didn't pay for the glasses. So you must say nothing about the Charities, but that sometimes money from my father came and sometimes it didn't, and that Mama took boarders. This was, in a delicate and choosy way, by ignoring and omitting certain large facts, true. It was true enough for *them,* and at the age of nine I could appreciate this perfectly. Better than my brother Simon, who was too blunt for this kind of maneuver and anyway, from books, had gotten hold of some English schoolboy notions of honor. "Tom Brown's Schooldays" for many years had an influence we were not in a position to afford. He was a blond boy with big cheekbones and wide gray eyes and had the arms of a cricketer—I go by the illustrations; we never played anything but softball. Opposed to his British style, was his patriotic anger at George III. The mayor was at that time ordering the school-board to get history books that dealt more harshly with the king, and Simon was very hot at Cornwallis. I admired this patriotic flash, his terrific personal wrath at the General and his satisfaction over his surrender at Yorktown which would often come over him at lunch while we ate our bologna sandwiches: Grandma had a piece of boiled chicken at noon and sometimes there was the gizzard for bristleheaded little Georgie who loved it and blew at the ridgy thing more to cherish than to cool it. But this martial true blood pride of Simon's disqualified him for the crafty task to be done at the dispensary where he was too disdainful to lie and might denounce everybody instead. I could be counted on to do the job, because I enjoyed it. I loved a piece of strategy. I had enthusiasms, too; I had Simon's, though there was never much meat in Cornwallis for me, and I had Grandma Lausch's as well. As for the truth of these statements I was instructed to make, well, it was a fact that my father had deserted and equally a fact that we had a boarder. Grandma Lausch was our boarder, not a relation at all. She was supported by two sons, one from Indianapolis and one from Racine, Wisconsin. The daughters-in-law did not want her, and she, the widow of a powerful Odessa businessman—a divinity over us, bald, whiskery, with a fat nose, greatly armored in a cutaway, a double-breasted vest, powerfully buttoned; his blue photo, enlarged and retouched by Mr. Lulov, hung in the parlor, doubled back between the portico columns of the full length mirror, the dome of the stove beginning where his trunk

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ended—she preferred to live with us, used to direct a house, to command, to govern, to manage, scheme, devise and intrigue in all her languages. She boasted French and German besides Russian, Polish and Yiddish; and who but Mr. Lulov, the retouch artist from Division Street, could have tested her claim to French? And he was a serene bogus, too, that triple-back-boned gallant tea-drinker. Except that he had been a hackie in Paris, once, and, if he told the truth about that, might have known French, among other things like playing tunes on his teeth with a pencil, singing and keeping time with a handful of coins that he rattled by jigging his thumb along the table and how to play chess.

Grandma Lausch played like Timur, whether chess or *klabyasch,* with palatal catty harshness and sharp gold in her eyes. *Klabyasch* she played with Mr. Kreines, a neighbor of ours who had taught her the game. A powerful stub-handed man with a large belly, he swatted the table with those hard hands of his, flinging down his cards and shouting *"Shtoch, Yasch, Menél, Klabyasch!"* Grandma looked sardonically at him. She often said, after he left, "If you've got a Hungarian friend, you don't need an enemy." But there was nothing of the enemy about Mr. Kreines. He merely, sometimes, sounded menacing because of his drill-sergeant's bark. He was an old-time Austro-Hungarian conscript and there was something soldierly about him: a neck that had strained with pushing artillery wheels, a campaigner's red in the face, a powerful bite in his jaw and gold-crowned teeth, green cock-eyes and soft short hair, altogether Napoleonic. His feet slanted out on the ideal of Frederick the Great but he was about a foot under the required height for guardsmen. He had a masterly look of independence. He and his wife, a woman quiet and modest to the neighbors and violently quarrelsome at home, and his son, a pharmacy student, lived in what was called the English basement, at the front of the house. The son, Kotzie, worked evenings in the corner drug-store and went to school in the neighborhood of County hospital, and it was he who told Grandma about the free dispensary. Or rather, the old woman sent for him to find out what one could get from those state and county places. She was always sending for people, the butcher, the grocer, the fruit-peddler, and received them in the kitchen to explain that the Marches had to have discounts. Mama usually had to stand by. The old woman would tell them,

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"You see how it is, do I have to say more? There's no man in the house and children to bring up." This was her most frequent argument. When Lubin, the case-worker, came round and sat in the kitchen, familiar, bald-headed, in his gold glasses, his weight comfortable, his mouth patient, she shot it at him: "How do you expect children to be brought up?" while he listened trying to remain comfortable but gradually becoming like a man determined not to let a grasshopper escape from his hand. "Well, my dear, Mrs. March could raise your rent," he said. She must often have answered, for there were times when she sent us all out to be alone with him, "Do you know what things would be like without me? You ought to be grateful for the way I hold them together." I'm sure she even said, "And when I die, Mr. Lubin, you'll see what you've got on your hands." I'm one hundred percent sure of it. To us nothing was ever said that might weaken her rule by suggesting it would ever end. Besides, it would have shocked us to hear it, and she, in her miraculous knowledge of us, able to be extremely close to our thoughts—she was one sovereign who knew exactly the proportions of love, respect and fear of power in her subjects—understood how we would have been shocked. But to Lubin, for reasons of policy and also because she had to express feelings she certainly had, she must have said it. He had a harassed patience with her of "deliver me from such clients," though he tried to appear master of the situation. He had his derby between his thighs (his suits, always too scanty in the pants, exposed white socks and bulldog shoes, crinkled, black and bulging with toes) and looked into the hat as though debating whether it was wise to release his grasshopper on the lining for a while.

"I pay as much as I can afford," she would say.

She took her cigarette case out from under her shawl, she cut a Murad in half with her sewing scissors and picked up the holder. This was still at a time when women did not smoke. Save the intelligentsia —the term she applied to herself. The holder in her dark little gums between which all her guile, malice and command issued, she had her best inspirations of strategy. She was as wrinkled as an old paper bag, an autocrat, hard-shelled and jesuitical, a pouncy old hawk of a bolshevik, her small ribboned and gray feet immobile on the shoe-kit and stool Simon had made in the manual-training class, the dingy old wool Winnie whose bad smell filled the flat on the cushion beside

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her. If wit and discontent don't necessarily go together, it wasn't from the old woman that I learned it. She was impossible to satisfy. Kreines, for example, on whom we could depend, Kreines who carried up the coal when Mama was sick and who instructed Kotzie to make up our prescriptions for nothing, she called "that trashy Hungarian," or "Hungarian pig." She called Kotzie, "the baked apple"; she called Mrs. Kreines "the secret goose," Lubin "the shoemaker's son," the dentist "the butcher," the butcher "the timid swindler." She detested the dentist who had several times unsuccessfully tried to fit her with teeth. She accused him of burning her gums when taking the impressions. But then she tried to pull his hands away from her mouth. I saw that happen: the stolid, square-framed Dr. Wernick whose compact forearms could have held off a bear, painfully careful with her, determined, concerned at her choked screams and enduring her scratches. To see her struggle like that was no easy thing for me, and Dr. Wernick was sorry to see me there, too, I know, but either Simon or I had to squire her wherever she went. Here particularly she needed a witness to Wernick's cruelty and clumsiness as well as a shoulder to lean on when she went weakly home. Already at ten I was only a little shorter than she and big enough to hold her small weight.

"You saw how he put his paws over my face so I couldn't breathe?" she said. "God made him to be a butcher. Why did he become a dentist? His hands are too heavy. The touch is everything to a dentist. If his hands aren't right, he shouldn't be let practice. But his wife worked hard to send him through school and made a dentist of him. And I must go to him and be burned because of it."

The rest of us had to go to the dispensary, which was like the dream of a multitude of dentists' chairs, hundreds of them in a space as enormous as an armory, with green bowls designed in glass grapes, drills lifted zig-zag as insects' legs, and gas flames on the porcelain swivel trays—a thundery gloom in Harrison Street of limestone county buildings and cumbersome red street-cars with metal grillwork on their windows and monarchical iron whiskers of cow-catchers, front and rear. They lumbered and clanged and their brake-tanks panted in the slushy brown of a winter afternoon or the bare stone brown of a summer's, salted with ash, smoke and prairie dust, with long stops at the clinics to let off clumpers, cripples, hunch-backs, brace-legs, crutch-wielders, tooth and eye sufferers and all the rest. So before going with

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my mother for the glasses I was always carefully instructed by the old woman and had to sit and listen with immaculate care. My mother too had to be present, for there must be no slip-up. She must be coached to say nothing. "Remember, Rebecca," Grandma would repeat, "let him answer everything." To which Mama was too obedient even to answer "yes" but only sat and kept her long hands folded on the bottle-fly irridescence of the dress the old woman had picked for her to wear. Very healthy and smooth, her color, none of us inherited it from her, or the form of her nose with nostrils turned back and showing a little of the partition. "You keep out of it. If they ask you something, you look at August like this." And illustrated how she was to turn to me, terribly exact, if she had only been able to drop her habitual grandeur. "Don't tell anything. Only answer questions," she said to me. My mother was anxious that I should be worthy and faithful. Simon and I were her miracles or accidents; Georgie was her own true work in which she returned to her fate after blessed and undeserved success. "Augie, listen to Grandma; hear what she says," was all she ever dared when the old woman unfolded her plan.

"When they ask you, 'Where is your father?' you say, 'I don't know where, Miss.' No matter how old she is, you shouldn't forget to say 'Miss.' If she wants to know where he was the last time you heard from him, you must tell her that the last time he sent a money-order was about two years ago from Buffalo, New York. Never say a word about the Charity. The Charity you should never mention, you hear that? Never. When she asks you how much the rent is, tell her eighteen dollars. When she asks where the money comes from, say you have boarders. How many? Two boarders. Now, say to me, how much rent?"

"Eighteen dollars."

"And how many boarders?"

"Two."

"And how much do they pay?"

"How much should I say?"

"Eight dollars each, a week."

"Eight dollars."

"So you can't go to a private doctor, if you get sixty-four dollars a month. The eye-drops alone cost me five when I went, and he

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scalded my eyes. And these specs," she tapped the case, "cost ten dollars the frames and fifteen the glasses."

Never but at such times, by necessity, was my father mentioned. I claimed to remember him; Simon denied that I did and Simon was right. I liked to imagine it.

"He wore a uniform," I said. "Sure I remember. He was a soldier."

"Like hell he was, you don't know anything about it."

"Maybe a sailor."

"Like hell. He drove a truck for Toll Brothers laundry on Marshfield, that's what he did. *I* said he used to wear a uniform. Monkey sees, monkey does; monkey hears, monkey says." Monkey was the basis of much thought with us. On the sideboard, on the Turkestan runner, eyes, ears and mouth covered, we had see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil, a lower trinity of the house. The advantage of lesser gods is that you can take their name any way you like. "Silence in the court-house, monkey wants to speak, speak monkey, speak." "The monkey and the bamboo were playing in the grass. . . . " Still the monkeys could be potent and awesome, besides, and deep social critics when the old woman, like a great Lama—for she is Eastern to me, in the end, as old Tolstoi is for many people a god of the pagan Russia, sitting in a painted chair under the summer apple-tree—would point to the squatting brown three whose mouths and nostrils were drawn in sharp blood red, and, with profound wit, her unkindness finally touching greatness, say, "Nobody asks you to love the whole world, only to be *ehrlich*. Don't have a loud mouth. The more you love people, the more they'll mix you up. A child loves, a person respects. Respect is better than love. And that's respect, the middle monkey." It never occurred to us that she sinned mischievously herself against that convulsed speak-no-evil who hugged his lips with his hands; no criticism of her came near us at any time, much less when the resonance of a great principle filled the whole kitchen.

She used to read us lessons off poor Georgie's head. He used to kiss the dog—this bickering handmaiden of the old lady. At one time. Now a dozy, long-sighing crank and proper object of respect for her years of right-minded but not exactly lovable busyness. But Georgie loved her. And Grandma, whom he would kiss on the sleeve, on the

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knee, taking knee or arm in both hands and putting his underlip forward, chaste, lummoxly, caressing, gentle and diligent when he bent his narrow back, blouse bagging all over it, whitish hair pointy and close as a burr or sun flower when the seeds have been picked out of it. The old lady let him embrace her and spoke to him in the following way: "Hey, you, boy, clever *junge,* you like the old Grandma, my minister, my cavalier? That's a boy. You know who's good to you, who gives you gizzards and necks? Who? Who makes noodles for you? Yes. Noodles are slippery, hard to pick up with a fork and hard to pick up with the fingers. You see how the little bird pulls the worm? The little worm wants to stay in the ground. The little worm doesn't want to come out. Enough, you're making my dress wet." And she'd sharply push his forehead off with her old prim hand, having fired off for Simon and me, mindful always of her duty to wise us up, one more animadversion on the trustful, loving and simple surrounded by the cunning-hearted and tough, a fighting nature of birds and worms, and a desperate mankind without feelings. Illustrated by Georgie. But the principal illustration was not Georgie but Mama, in her love-originated servitude, simple-minded, abandoned with three children. That was what old lady Lausch was driving at, now, in the later wisdom of her life, that she had a second family to lead.

And what must Mama have thought when in any necessary connection my father was brought into the conversation? She sat docile. I conceive that she thought of some detail about him—a dish he liked, perhaps meat and potatoes, perhaps cabbage or cranberry sauce; perhaps that he disliked a starched collar, or a soft collar; that he brought home the Evening American or the Journal. She thought this because her thoughts were always simple; but she felt abandonment, and greater pains than conscious mental ones put a dark streak to her simplicity. I don't know how she made out before, when we were alone after the desertion, but Grandma came and put a regulating hand on the family life. Mama surrendered powers to her that maybe she had never known she had and took her punishment in drudgery; occupied a place, I suppose, among women conquered by a superior force of love, like those women Zeus got the better of in animal form who next had to take cover from his furious wife. Not that I can see my big, gentle, dilapidated, scrubbing and lugging mother as a fugitive of immense beauty from such classy wrath, or

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our father as a marble legged Olympian. She had sewed button-holes in a coat factory in a Wells Street loft and he was a laundry driver—there wasn't even so much as a picture of him left when he blew. But she does have a place among such women by the deeper right of continual payment. And as for vengeance from a woman, Grandma Lausch was there to administer the penalties under the standards of legitimacy, representing the main body of married womankind.

Still the old lady had a heart. I don't mean to say she didn't. She was tyrannical and a snob about her Odessa lustre of servants and governesses, but though she had been a success herself she knew what it was to fall down through susceptibility. I afterwards began to realize this when I read some of the novels she used to send me to the library for. She taught me the Russian alphabet for that purpose. Once a year she read *Anna Karenina* and *Eugene Onegin*. Occasionally I got into hot water by bringing a book she didn't want. "How many times do I have to tell you, if it doesn't say *roman* I don't want it. You didn't look inside. Are your fingers too weak to open the book? Then they should be too weak to play ball or pick your nose. For that you've got strength. *Boshe!* you haven't got the brains of a cat, to walk two miles and bring me a book about religion because it says Tolstoi on the cover."

The old *grande dame,* I don't want to be misrepresenting her. She was suspicious of what could have been, given one wrong stitch of heredity, a family vice by which we could have been exploited. She didn't want to read Tolstoi on religion. She didn't trust him as a family man because the Countess had had such trouble with him. But although she never went to the synagogue, ate bread on Passover, sent mama to the pork butcher where meat was cheaper, loved canned lobster and other forbidden food, she was not an atheist and free-thinker. Mr. Anticol, the old junky she called (search me why) "Rameses"—after the city named with Pithom in the Scriptures, maybe; no telling what her inspirations were—was that. A real rebel to God. Icy and canny, she would listen to what he had to say and wouldn't declare herself. He was ruddy and gloomy, his leathery serge cap made him flat-headed and his alley calls for rags, old iron—*recks a line,* he sung it—made him gravel voiced and gruff. He had tough hair and brows and despising brown eyes; he was a studious,

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shaggy, meaty old man. Grandma bought a set of the Encyclopedia Americana for 1892 from him and saw to it that Simon and I read it; and he too, whenever he met us, asked, "How's the set?" believing, I reckon, that it taught irreverence to religion. What made him an atheist was a massacre of Jews in his town. From the cellar where he was hidden, he saw a laborer pissing on the body of his wife's young brother, just killed. "So don't talk to me about God," he said. But it was he that talked about God, all the time. And while Mrs. Anticol stayed pious, it was his idea of grand apostasy to drive to the reform-synagogue on the high holidays and park his pink-eye nag among the luxurious, whirl-wired touring cars of the rich Jews who bared their heads inside as if they were attending a theater, a kind of abjectness in them that gave him grim entertainment to the end of his life. He caught a cold in the rain and died of the pneumonia that developed.

While Grandma, all the same, burned a candle on the anniversary of Mr. Lausch's death, threw a lump of dough on the coals when she was baking, as a kind of offering, had incantations over baby-teeth and stunts against the evil eye. It was kitchen religion and had nothing to do with the giant God of the creation who turned back the waters and exploded Gomorrah, but it was on the side of religion, at that. And while we're on that side, I'll mention the Poles—we were just a handful amongst them in the neighborhood—and the swollen, bleeding hearts on every kitchen wall, the pictures of saints, baskets of death flowers tied in at the door, communions, Easters and Christmases. And sometimes we were chased, stoned, bitten and beat up for Christ-killers, all of us, even Georgie, articled, whether we liked it or not, to this mysterious business. But I never had any special grief from it, or brooded, being by and large too larky and boisterous to take it to heart but looked at it as needing no more special explanation than the stone and bat wars of the street-gangs or the swarming on a fall evening of parish punks to rip up fences, screech and bawl at girls and beat strangers of any foreign or tinged look. And it could have been something occult in its way if it was in my nature to fatigue myself with worry over it, for some of my friends and playmates would turn up in the middle of these mobs to trap you between houses from both ends of a passageway. Simon had less truck with them. School absorbed him more and he had his

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sentiments, anyway, a mixed extract from Natty Bumppo, Quentin Durward, Tom Brown, Clark at Kaskakia, the messenger who brought the good news from Ratisbon, and so on, that kept him more to himself. I was just a slow understudy to this, just as he never got me to put in hours on his Sandow muscle builder and the gimmick for developing the sinews of the wrist. I was an easy touch for friendships, and most of the time they were cut short by older loyalties. I was pals longest with Stashu Kopecs whose mother was a midwife graduated from the Aesculapian School of Midwifery on Milwaukee Avenue. Well to do, the Kopecses had an electric player piano and linoleums in all the rooms, but Stashu was a thief, and to run with him I stole, too: coal off the cars, clothes from the lines, rubber balls from the dime-store and pennies off the newsstands. Mostly for the satisfaction of dexterity, though Stasnu invented the game of stripping in the cellar and putting on the girls' things swiped from the clothes-lines. Then he too showed up in a gang that caught me one cold afternoon of very little snow while I was sitting on a crate frozen into the mud eating Nabisco wafers, my throat full of the sweet dust. Foremost, there was a thug of a kid, about thirteen but undersized, hard and grieved looking. He came up to accuse me and big Moonya Staplanski, just out of the St. Charles Reformatory and headed next for the one at Pontiac, backed him up.

"You little Jew bastard, you hit my brother," he said.

"I never did. I never even saw him before."

"You took away a nickel from him. How did you buy them biscuits else, you."

"I got them at home."

Then I caught sight of Stashu, hay-headed and jeering, pleased to sickness with his deceit and his new-revealed brotherhood with the others, and I said, "Hey, you lousy bed-wetter, Stasnu, you know Moon ain't even got a brother."

Here the kid hit me and the gang was on me, Stashu with the rest, tearing the buckles from my sheepskin coat and bloodying my nose.

"Who is to blame?" said Grandma Lausch when I came home. "You know who? You are, August, because that's all the brains you have to go with that piss-in-bed accoucherka's son. Does Simon hang around with them? He has too much sense." I thanked God she didn't

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know about the stealing. And in a way, because that was her schooling temperament, I suspect she was pleased that I should see where it led to give your affections too easily. But Mama, the prime example of this weakness, was horrified. Against the old lady's authority, she didn't dare to introduce a feeling during the hearing, but when she took me into the kitchen to put a compress on me she nearsightedly pored over my scratches, whispering and sighing to me, while Georgie tottered around behind her, long and white, and Winnie lapped water under the sink.

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Albert Camus

BETWEEN YES AND NO

If it is true that the only paradise is that which one has lost, I know what name to give that something tender and inhuman which dwells within me today. An emigrant comes back to his native land. And I, I remember. Irony, tautness, all is silent, and here am I repatriated. I do not want to ponder my happiness. It is a good deal simpler and a good deal easier than that. For of those hours which I summon up from the depth of oblivion, there has been preserved intact the memory of a pure emotion, of a moment suspended in eternity. That alone is true in me, and I am always aware of it too late. We take pleasure in the trailing off of a gesture, in the propriety of a tree in the landscape. And all we have for recreating this love is a detail, but an adequate detail: the odor of a room that has remained closed too long, the peculiar sound of a footstep on the road. And so with me. And if I loved at the time and gave of myself, I was myself at last since only love restores us to ourselves.

Slow, peaceful and sober, these hours return just as potent, just as moving—because it is evening, because the hour is sad and there is a kind of vague desire in the starless sky. Each recaptured gesture reveals me to myself. Someone once said to me, "It's so difficult to live." And I remember the tone. Another time someone murmured, "The worst mistake, after all, is to make someone suffer." When all is over, the thirst for life is quenched. Is that what is called happiness? As we look back over these memories, we clothe everything in the same sober garment, and death appears like a backdrop with faded tones. We rake up our past. We feel our distress and we love the better for it. Yes, maybe that's what happiness is, the pathetic feeling of our unhappiness.

That's just what it's like this evening. In this Moorish café, at the

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very end of the Moorish town, I remember not a happiness gone by, but rather a strange feeling. It is already night. On the walls, sheiks clothed in green are being pursued among leafy palms by canary-yellow lions. In a corner of the café an acetylene lamp casts a flickering light. The real lighting comes from a little enamelled oven in the fireplace. The flame lights up the center of the room and I feel the shadows it casts on my face. I am facing the door and the bay. The proprietor of the café, crouching in a corner, seems to be looking at my empty glass, at the bottom of which is a mint leaf. Nobody inside, the noise of the city below, farther off, lights on the bay. I hear the Arab breathing very hard, and his eyes gleam in the shadow. Is that the sound of the sea off in the distance? The world is sighing out to me in a long rhythm and brings me the indifference and the tranquillity of that which does not die. The lions on the walls undulate in the great red shadows of the flame. The beacons begin to turn: a green light, a red one, a white one. And always the great sigh of the world. A kind of secret song is born of this indifference. And here am I repatriated. I think of a child who lived in a poor neighborhood. What a neighborhood, what a house! It was only one story high and there was no light on the stairway. Now again, years later, he could go back there in the middle of the night. He knows that he would climb the stairway at full speed without even once stumbling. His very body is permeated with this house. His legs still retain the exact measurement of the height of the steps. His hand, the instinctive horror, which he has never overcome, of the banister. And it was because of the cockroaches.

On summer evenings, the workmen sit on the balconies. In his house there was only a tiny window. So they used to bring chairs down in front of the house and enjoy the evening. There was the street, the dairyman next door, the cafés opposite and the noise of children running from door to door. But above all, between the big ficus trees, there was the sky. There is a solitude in poverty, but a solitude which restores to each thing its value. At a certain degree of fortune, the sky itself and the starry night seem to be natural wealth. But at the bottom of the scale, the sky takes on its full meaning: a priceless grace. Summer nights, mysteries in which stars sputtered. Behind the child was a smelly hallway and his little chair, which was punctured, sagged beneath him slightly. But his eyes were

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turned upward and he drank from the pure night. At times a big trolley-car would rush by. A drunkard would croon at a street corner without managing to disturb the silence.

The mother of the child remained just as silent. Occasionally someone would ask her, "What are you thinking about?" "Nothing," she would answer. And it was quite true. Everything was there, therefore nothing. Her life, her interests, her children, were simply there, too natural a presence to be felt. She was frail and had difficulty thinking. She had a harsh and dominating mother to whose egotism, like that of a pampered pet, everything had to be sacrificed and for a long time she had been dominating her daughter's weak spirit. Though emancipated by her marriage, the daughter docilely returned home when her husband died. He had died on the field of honor, as they say. In a prominent place could be seen the *croix de guerre* and the military medal in a gilded frame. The hospital also sent the widow a shell splinter that had been found in his flesh. The widow kept it. Her grief is a thing of the past. She has forgotten her husband but still speaks of her children's father. She works in order to provide for them and gives her money to her mother. The latter brings them up with a whip. When she hits too hard, her daughter says, "Don't hit on the head." Because they are her children, she is fond of them. She loves them equally with a love which has never been revealed to them. At times, such as evenings like this which he remembers, when she would return from an exhausting day's work (she did housecleaning), she would find the house empty. The old woman would be out shopping, the children still at school. She would then sink down in a chair and would sit and stare vacantly at a groove in the floor. The night would deepen about her, and in the darkness such silence would be irremediably desolate. If the child entered at such a moment, he would make out the thin outline with the bony shoulders and would stop: he was frightened. He was beginning to feel a lot of things. He was just beginning to grow aware of his own existence. But it hurt to cry before this animal silence. He pitied his mother. Did that mean that he loved her? She had never caressed him because she would not have known how to. He would then remain watching her for endless minutes. Feeling strange, he would grow aware of his pain. She would not hear him, for she was deaf with fatigue. The old woman would return shortly thereafter; life

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would be reborn, the round light of the kerosene lamp, the oilcloth, the cries, the coarse words. But for the time being the silence marks a stopping point, a moment beyond reckoning. Because he has felt this confusedly, the child thinks that the burst of feeling within him is love for his mother. And he ought to, for after all it is his mother.

She is not thinking of anything. Outside is the light, the noises; here, the silence in the night. The child will grow up, will learn. They are bringing him up and they will expect gratitude, as if they were sparing him suffering. His mother will always have these spells of silence. And he will grow in suffering. Being a man, that's what counts. His grandmother will die, then his mother, and he.

The mother has jumped up with a start. She has been frightened. He looks idiotic staring at her that way. Let him go do his homework. The child has done his homework. Today he is in a sordid café. He is now a man. Isn't that what counts? The answer must be no, since doing one's homework and agreeing to be a man lead to being old.

The Arab in his corner, still squatting, is holding his feet between his hands. From the terraces, a smell of grilled coffee rises up with the lively chattering of young voices. A tugboat again sounds its deep and tender note. The world draws to a close here, as every day, and nothing now remains of all its measureless torments but this promise of peace. The indifference of this strange mother! Only the immense solitude of the world shows me what it really is. One night, her son—who was already grown—was called to her side. She had received a shock which resulted in a serious emotional disturbance. She was in the habit of sitting out on the balcony at the end of the day. She would take a chair and put her mouth on the cold salty iron of the balcony. She would then watch the people go by. Behind her, the night would gradually deepen. In front of her, the stores would suddenly light up. The street would swell with people and light. She would lose herself in an aimless contemplation. On the evening in question, a man had suddenly appeared behind her, had dragged her, treated her brutally and fled upon hearing some noise. She had seen nothing and had fainted. She was lying in bed when her son arrived. He decided, upon the advice of a doctor, to spend the night at her side. He stretched out on the bed, beside her, upon the blankets. It was summer. The fear of the recent scene lingered in the overheated room. Footsteps shuffled by and doors creaked. In the heavy

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air floated the odor of the vinegar which had been used to revive the sick person. She tossed about, whimpered, at times awoke with a start. She would tear him out of the short naps from which he would rise up dripping with sweat, already alert, and into which he would heavily fall back after a glance at the watch on which, for the third time, the flame of the night lamp danced about. It was not until later that he felt how alone they had been that night. Alone against all. The "others" slept through the hours when they two were breathing fever. Everything in that old house then seemed hollow. As the midnight trolleys rattled off into the distance, they drained away the hope that comes to us from men, all the certainties we derive from the noise of cities. The house would resound a while with their passing and then gradually all would grow silent. All that remained was a big garden of silence in which there shot up the frightened groans of the invalid. Never had he felt at such a loss. The world had dissolved and along with it the illusion that life begins anew every day. Nothing existed any more, studies or ambitions, preferences in the restaurant or favorite colors. Nothing but the illness and death into which he felt himself plunged. . . . And yet, the very hour that the world was crumbling, he was living. And he had even fallen asleep finally. Not, however, without carrying with him the desperate and tender image of their dual solitude. Later on, much later, he was to remember that mixed odor of sweat and vinegar, the moment when he had felt the bonds that linked him to his mother. As if it were the immense pathos of her heart, spread about him, become tangible, and playing earnestly, heedless of imposture, the role of a poor old woman with a pathetic destiny.

Now the fire in the hearth is covered over with ashes. And always the same sigh of the earth. A derbouka utters its rippling chant. A merry woman's voice flattens against it. Lights are moving up the bay, probably fishing boats returning to the harbor. The triangle of sky which I see from where I sit is free of the daytime clouds. Crammed with stars, it quivers in a passing breath of wind and the velvet wings of night beat slowly about me. How far will the night go, this night to which I no longer belong? There is a dangerous quality in the word simplicity. And tonight I understand that one can want to die because, as regards a certain transparency of life, nothing is important any more. A man suffers and undergoes one misfortune after

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another. He endures them, settles down in his destiny. He is esteemed. And then, one night, nothing. He meets a friend whom he has been very fond of. The latter speaks to him in an off-hand way. When he gets home, the man kills himself. People then speak of personal troubles and secret dramas. No. And if there absolutely must be a cause, he killed himself because a friend spoke to him off-handedly. Thus, every time I have seemed to feel the deeper meaning of the world, it is its simplicity which has always overwhelmed me. My mother that evening, and her strange indifference. Another time, I lived in a cottage in the suburbs with a dog, two cats and their kittens, all black. The mother couldn't nurse them. One by one the kittens died. They would fill their room with muck. And every evening when I returned, I would find one all rigid with its lips curled up. One evening I found the last kitten half eaten by its mother. It had already begun to smell. The odor of death mingled with the odor of urine. I sat down in the midst of all this wretchedness, and, with my hands in the muck, breathing the odor of putrefaction, I stared for a long time at the wild flame blazing in the green eyes of the mother who crouched motionless in a corner. Yes. That's just what it's like this evening. At a certain point of destitution, nothing leads to anything any more, there seems to be no basis for either hope or hopelessness, and my whole life is summed up in an image. But why stop there? Simple, everything is simple; in the lighthouse beacons, a green light a red one, a white one; in the coolness of the evening and the odors of the city and the squalor which rise up to me. If this evening it is the image of a certain childhood which comes back to me, how can I help welcoming the lesson of love and poverty which I draw from it? Since this hour is like an interval between yes and no, I leave for other hours the hope and disgust of living. Yes, to epitomize only the transparence and simplicity of lost paradises—in an image. And thus it is that not long ago, in a house in an old neighborhood, a son went to see his mother. They are sitting facing one another, in silence. But their eyes meet.

"Well, mamma?"

"Well, all right."

"Are you bored? Don't I talk enough?"

"Oh, you never talked much."

And a lovely lipless smile melts over her face. It's true, he never

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did talk to her much. But really, what need is there? Through silence the situation clarifies. He is her son, she is his mother. She can say to him, "You know."

She is sitting at the foot of the sofa, her feet together, her hands together on her knees. He sits on a chair, hardly looks at her and smokes one cigarette after another. A silence.

"You shouldn't smoke so much."

"That's true."

The whole smell of the neighborhood comes in through the window. The accordion in the nearby café, the heavy evening traffic, the smell of the skewers of broiled meat that one eats between rubbery rolls, a child crying in the street. The mother gets up and takes a piece of knitting. Her fingers are stiff and deformed by arthritis. She doesn't work quickly, doing the same stitch three times or undoing a whole row with a dull sputtering.

"It's a little vest. I'll wear it with a white collar. That and my black coat, and I'll be dressed for the season."

She has gotten up to put on a light.

"It's getting dark early these days."

Which was true. It was no longer summer and not yet fall. Martlets were still crying in the gentle sky.

"Will you come again soon?"

"But I haven't gone yet? Why do you say that?"

"No, it was just to say something."

A trolley goes by. An auto.

"Is it true that I resemble my father?"

"The spitting image of your father. Of course, you didn't know him. You were six months old when he died. But if you had a little moustache. . . . "

He spoke of his father without conviction. No memory, no emotion. Probably a man like a lot of others. Moreover, he had gone off very enthusiastically. His skull ripped open at the Marne. Blind and in agony for a week, his name inscribed on the monument to the local war dead.

"After all," she said, "it's better. He would have come back blind or crazy, the poor thing."

"That's true."

Just what is it that keeps him in that room, if not the certainty

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that it's always better, the feeling that the whole absurd simplicity of the world has taken refuge in this room.

"Will you be back?" she asks. "I know you've got work to do. But, from time to time. . . ."

But right now, where am I? And how am I to separate this empty café from that room of the past? I no longer know whether I am living or whether I am remembering. The lighthouse beacons are there before me. And the Arab getting up in front of me tells me that he is going to close. I have to leave. I no longer want to go down that dangerous slope. It is true that I take a last look at the bay and its lights, that what rises up to me is not the hope of better days, but a serene and primitive indifference to everything and to myself. But that soft and easy curve must be broken. And I need my lucidity. Yes, everything is simple. It's men who complicate things. Don't let them tell us otherwise. Don't let them say to us about the man condemned to death that "he's going to pay his debt to society," but rather that "they're going to cut his head off." This may not seem like much, but it makes a bit of a difference. And then there are people who prefer to look their fate in the eyes.

(*Translated by Bernard Frechtman*)

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Theodore Roethke

UNFOLD! UNFOLD!

By snails, by leaps of frog, I came here, spirit.
Tell me, body without skin, does a fish sweat?
I can't crawl back through those veins,
I ache for another choice.
The cliffs! The cliffs! They fling me back.
Eternity howls in the last crags,
The field is no longer simple:
It's a soul's crossing time.
The dead speak noise.

II

It's time you stood up and asked
—Or sat down and did.
A tongue without song
—Can still whistle in a jug.
You're blistered all over
—Who cares? The old owl?
When you find the wind
—Look for the white fire.

III

What a whelm of proverbs, Mr. Pinch!
Are the entrails clear, immaculate cabbage?
The last time I nearly whispered myself away.
I was far back, farther than anybody else.
On the jackpine plains I hunted the bird nobody knows;
Fishing, I caught myself behind the ears.
Alone, in a sleep-daze, I stared at billboards;
I was privy to oily fungus and the algae of standing waters;
Honoured, on my return, by the ancient fellowship of rotten stems.

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I was pure as a worm on a leaf; I cherished the mould's children.
Beetles sweetened my breath.
I slept like an insect.

I met a collector of string, a shepherd of slow forms.
My mission became the salvation of minnows.
I stretched like a board, almost a tree.
Even thread had a speech.

Later, I did and I danced in the simple wood.
A mouse taught me how. I was a happy asker.
Quite-by-chance brought me many cookies.
I jumped in butter.
Hair had kisses.

IV

Easy the life of the mouth. What a lust for ripeness!
All openings praise us, even oily holes.
The bulb unravels. Who's floating? Not me.
The eye perishes in the small vision.
What else has the vine loosened?
I hear a dead tongue halloo.

V

Sing, sing, you symbols! All simple creatures,
All small shapes, willow-shy,
In the obscure haze, sing!

A light song comes from the leaves.
A slow sigh says yes. And light sighs;
A low voice, summer-sad.
Is it you, cold father? Father,
For whom the minnows sang?

A house for wisdom; a field for revelation.
Speak to the stones, and the stars answer.
At first the visible obscures:
Go where light is.

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This fat can't laugh.
Only my salt has a chance.
I'll seek my own meekness.
What grace I have is enough.
The lost have their own pace.
The stalks ask something else.
What the grave says,
The rest denies.

In their harsh thickets
The dead thrash.
They leap.

Robert Fitzgerald

SOUTH SIDE

The sun in the south hanged a winter heaven
Of crooked stacks and smoke, a sullen glare
Low and blinding in the harsh cold.
Go down any street; it has long darkened,
Abiding your weary eye with patience.
Your prey with a crazed forgotten cupola
Stained by the fumes of rain and switch engines:
A home for the aged. Cut through any yard,
The grey mud which it hurls will run gold
Into a morning gutter and soon go black,
The drain of a smelly thaw. Now the frost
Holds, and the winter, and the winter sun,
As a single stranger, ducking against the sting
That blows across lots, comes, and at a corner
Heaves his old overcoat apart, scrabbling
Up from his hip a sticky ball of handkerchief:
Out for an airing on Sunday afternoon.

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Charles Francis Knauber

JUDA

This is the boy piped to a metaphor—
A song of six bits, pocketful of fear
The crooked fingers in my blood should spend.
What wound will bear him with the fumbled mind
I give him: child with crossed sight, double sex?
Time has a way of playing ugly tricks:
A sexton's son is born with rope-burned hands,
Then clang and music from a churchtop ends.
I mean a child can sometimes break a dream
Until its parents never seem the same.
I cannot make good metaphor, nor rhyme
The marked scream with its world that rents a slum.

Drum-bellied girls whose insides beat like life,
Or drag them till my simile is grief,
Walk like fat drawings on an obscene wall
That some abnormal boy did for a spell
Upon his soles. These are magic dances
Who cross their husbands with their chalky limbs.
I think them in iambics that sing doom.
What omen peeks out from each ringing bone:
A miracle musician, or a fry
With two gongs where his one-cent eyes should be?
Big ladies, those are troopers at your groin;
They play my trouble's music out of tune.

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Niccolo Tucci

THE FALLACY OF CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

The following episode may be entitled: End of a Friendship. Here it is:

There were in Washington during the recent war two friends who worked together in the government; one of them in the State Department as a career diplomat, the other in a newly organized war agency, one of those many bureaucratic eggs laid by the wide-winged O.E.M. chicken: the Office of Emergency Management.

Both these friends had ideals, both believed in the "war to end dictatorship," both thought that someone should remind the higher-ups from time to time not to lose sight of their responsibilities toward the people in whose name the war was being fought.

To both the vagueness of the Atlantic Charter had appeared as a great peril; they had both foreseen that Article One (no territorial aggrandizements) was slated to become Breach One right after the war; that Article Two (free access to raw materials to anyone who could pay for them) was like announcing the reopening of the shop after alterations; they had both referred to the entire document as the Atlantic Chatter, for which nickname each credited the other. But that is not all. They had both constantly refused to adopt the then current practice of dividing the world into Peaceloving and Aggressor Nations; they had criticized the secrecy of Teheran, Yalta, Casablanca and later Potsdam, although both of them had been warned by their superiors in office not to "split the Allies," as one said at that time to stop Government critics. In other words, there could not be a more complete understanding between two young men working together.

At a certain moment they had parted ways; one of them feeling an inborn urge to write, had decided to write and never again to be

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caught making a living, while the other, who felt no such urge, decided to stay on and become, if possible, a high-ranking diplomat. They both did what they wanted; the writer wrote, criticizing now this and now that of the absurdities of politics, the other buttoned up his coat and his lips, and, instead of expressing his amazement at what he saw, he erased all symptoms of its presence from his face. But the feelings of both remained the same: the writer went on laughing at his typewriter, while the diplomat laughed at the Club.

When they met again in New York a few years later, the writer greeted his old friend with the same warmth of former days, but was instantly sobered down by the most diplomatic "Good Morning," followed by the strange remark: "So you write, do you? I have read your articles these past three years."

"Oh, have you?" said the writer, still hoping to break through that ice, "and what do you think of them?"

"Quickly done, to criticize everything as you do," answered the diplomat. "Anyone can do that. Why don't you give us some constructive alternatives for all you think is so terribly wrong in our foreign policy?"

For a moment the writer was stunned. "Quickly done?" he asked, "What do you mean by that? Does it take you so long to commit a mistake? If it's the speed of my criticism that makes you envious, all you have to do is take a chronometer and measure the time it takes high government officials to commit their mistakes and the time it takes me to criticize them, then you will see who wins. A President today gives instructions by phone; they are covered with secrecy for the usual security reasons, and their results are first known to the public when those instructions have already done their damage, while the government has already set into motion its public relations machinery whose job it is to sell government policies as good. I, the free-lance journalist, must read between the lines, and before I can realize what damage has been done to the cause of peace, it takes me about three days. Two more days it takes me to scribble an article of critical comment, after which I must peddle it from magazine to magazine until I sell it two weeks later to a third-rate publication, the editor of which keeps it on his desk for another three weeks and then prints half of it because by that time, thanks to the government public relations office, everybody has accepted the government's point

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of view. And then you have the nerve to reproach me for mentioning so late in some forgotten corner of the press one half of the nonsense that all the papers give in headline as the greatest political move of our day. 'Quickly done!' you say."

"Never mind," said the diplomat, who had listened to this long speech with no sign of either impatience or approval, " I still say this is quickly done. Anyone can do that. It doesn't take much intelligence to be destructive."

"I know that," said the writer, "and I never claimed that it takes a superior intelligence to criticize the government. As you so rightly put it, anyone can do that . . . but who does? People with government jobs can't do it; that wouldn't be correct; and if they could, they wouldn't do it anyway; that wouldn't be wise. So the critic must be a free-lancer, which means that he must do a pretty thankless job unless he is a columnist of nation-wide repute, and even then, his criticism will be viewed as treason."

"I still contend that you are wrong," said the diplomat, "even though I must add that, in private, I have often agreed with what you said in your articles and would probably still agree with you now. But *in private* I said and wish to repeat; *not* in public. Unless you can offer some good, workable alternative, it is very bad to discredit the government, because that leads to fascism, you should know this."

"Sorry," said the writer coldly, "I don't think we agree." After which they both parted, "former" friends.

Now, as the reasons put forth in the above are so frequently heard today as to have become standard phrases in our daily arguments at home, in the street, in the press and over the radio, let us examine the problem and see what it is that wrecks friendships, provides quarrelling couples with excuses to fight, and divides public opinion in so deep a manner.

At first sight, all there seems to be to it is that some believe the truth should be whispered, others told aloud. It's a matter of form. The opinions may well be the same, and, what is more surprising, they are for the most part the same, because most of those who thus argue seem to agree wholeheartedly on one basic point: that we must preserve our free discussion from the danger of Communist thought-control.

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Critics have never been a welcome race at any time, and the man who, while being a believer in criticism, has never detested his critics, still has to be discovered. In fact, this would be like saying that a man can take criticism lightly *and* seriously at the same time. If we love the work we have done, as politicians, artists, craftsmen, anything (and we *do* love it because nothing serious is done without love), we will have to hate those who kill it, even though at a later moment we may be very grateful to them. The acceptance of criticism is the hardest part of creation.

But what is the state of criticism in our days? In the democratic countries, sharp political critics are less frequent today than at any time before. And by critics we mean loud critics, for the totalitarian countries are just one continuous, inarticulate whisper of the best criticism, the most brilliant remarks, the most poisonous jokes; one could not want anything more to the point in the line of criticism, yet a difference between those countries and the free countries must exist. Unfortunately, in the democratic countries, and especially in this country, people are still laboring under the impression that to question the wisdom of their leaders is to disturb them. Statesmen are busy people, swamped with technical work, tired and nervous. Whoever is not swamped with technical work, tired and nervous, but is instead relaxed, serene and clear-minded, is almost by definition a good-for-nothing and a parasite. Thus the very rare critics who still do their job honestly and fearlessly are criticized today *because* they are able to do it, *because* they are not corrupt, defeated by financial difficulties, or by their own indifference. This being the absurd situation, it is about time what we begin to criticize the critics of the critics.

So let's begin with the most unpleasant truth. In the tradition of the greatest masters of all time, criticism is above all negative and destructive. "Someone may wonder," says Socrates in his *Apology*, "why I go about in private giving advice and busying myself with the concerns of others, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the state. . . . I am certain, O men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. And do not be offended at my telling you the truth, for the truth is that no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; *he who*

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will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one."

And a little bit later in the same breath of eloquence, "Now do you really imagine that I could have survived all these years if I had led a public life, supposing that, like a good man, I had always maintained the right and made justice, as I ought, the first thing? No indeed, Men of Athens, neither I nor any other man."

Thus Socrates. As for Voltaire and Dean Swift, two of the greatest political minds that ever lived, they were just as constructive as sulphuric acid. It is only in our time that the idea of constructiveness has taken on such a hold in the business of criticism. Indeed, constructiveness today has become typical of this country and is considered a symptom of American youthfulness and fighting spirit. On the surface it may well appear that constructiveness is really a symptom of these fine things, but a slightly closer observation reveals in it obvious symptoms of decay and utter indifference to everything.

The constructiveness of the *Reader's Digest,* for example, so readily accepted by many millions in so many countries as typically American, is nothing but a polite way to tone down the discussion and turn out of doors the inquisitive spirit of the philosopher always behaving like the elephant in the China shop. It is too bad that all those millions cannot read and study carefully the only good analysis of the *Reader's Digest* in existence: *Little Wonder* by John Bainbridge, a great classic of critical journalism.

For the *Reader's Digest* you must be constructive because it is bad manners to leave your audience with doubts after they have read your articles and heard your lecture. They don't want intellectual hangovers. Constructiveness is, in other words, the political or philosophical equivalent of the happy ending in the movies or in magazine stories, and if there is now a trend away from it, that is because there have been so many happy endings everywhere on paper, on the screen and through the microphone, that the editors, producers, forum moderators and whoever else supervises these things, have begun to feel that perhaps it was a little more in keeping with the times if they left their customers with a vague feeling of uneasiness about the fate of the world.

Another current prejudice about this kind of constructiveness is that it expresses the very core of the democratic spirit. You never

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criticize anyone without offering them, on the same tray with the poison that is supposed to kill them, a chaser and a three-thousand word memo describing the kind of world you would modestly suggest that they substitute for the one in which they have been living so far. Now, with all due respect for the democratic intentions of those who advocate this type of debate, article or lecture, it would seem to us that nothing expresses more clearly the childish arrogance of a certain type of mind than this distortion of the function of criticism. Why should the poor devil who discovers that something does not make sense to him strive to become an expert before he can say so? Does he have to be an expert to trust his healthy instinct? Or does one graduate in instinct, and since when?

The fact is that this typically modern hatred *of all criticism based on common sense* is just another aspect of the current prejudice that *all human activity should be specialized*. The common man, to use for once with concreteness the most outworn cliché of our age, has a right to declare that things as they are don't please him, from the point of view of his ignorance alone. His ignorance may of course exclude him from a meeting of experts (in ballistics, bacteriological warfare, propaganda, counterpropaganda, etc.), but it cannot possibly exclude him from the number of the living, because, beyond all the knowledge that man may (and, alas, *does*) acquire, there is still, even if not for too long, man himself, with the unexplainable fact of his existence.

If magazine editors or forum moderators cannot allow anyone who is not an expert to speak, he may call himself an expert in smell and say that certain things to him smell badly. Here we see how the principles of democracy are not invoked at all by the defenders of constructivism at all costs. In fact, a real believer in democracy would put it this way: "The President may be the greatest man in the world, but the one thing he will never be able to see is the shape of the White House in the frame of his own windows. Being in there, this is his limitation; if he wants to hear the White House described from the outside, he will have to rely on the description of the man sitting at the window atop the drugstore on Seventeenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue."

But those in politics are quite aware of this. They know perfectly well that they may always be called to task by the famous com-

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mon man, with the embarrassing argument: "You always claim that you do things for me, that you spend sleepless nights thinking of my problems, that my good is your only aim in life. I do not approve of what you have done, and it is up to you to give me, in my simple language, better evidence of your wisdom."

Democracy having lost all significance in the minds of most statesmen and politicians, that is why such abundant use of military secrecy is being made in our time. It may be said in fact that the right to withhold information from the people on the basis of security reasons is the greatest loot the winning democracies have taken over from the totalitarian countries. And, most unfortunately, the people in our age having become so dejected, so unwilling to assert any right other than that of existing materially, the statesmen get away with the most incredible nonsense.

But going back from these sad general considerations to the subject of modern constructiveness, it is easy to see that nobody has a right to impose upon a negative critic the obligation to produce a workable substitute for the idea or policy he is shattering to pieces. A negation stands by itself in its own right, and the man who makes such a negation and is therefore guilty of disturbing the mental dullness of his opponents, has the right to say that he doesn't feel equipped to go one step further in suggesting constructive substitutes for the thing he dislikes, and this will not invalidate in any way his negative argumentation. In fact it is he, and he alone, who, with his stubborn "no" establishes the link between the various specialists in their ivory towers and reality. If there is anything real in those ivory towers, it will be proven real only by the fact that it makes sense to him. If instead he has to be invited in and initiated into the mysteries of each tower's specialty, that is, if he has to leave the ground of common sense before he can even begin to understand those constructions, then those constructions are phantasmagoria for which there exists no proof of truth.

Of course, all the critics of criticism, all the manipulators of constructiveness, who exact such intellectual passports to admit anyone to the slightest expression of doubt, are, for the most part, unaware of the monstrous implications of their demands; and not less unaware than they are the lecturers and writers themselves who gladly

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comply and play the ridiculous comedy of going just so far and no further because the second half of their lecture *must* counterbalance the first half with Oh, such hopeful propositions.

Now, at the present moment, when lecturers and writers can hardly avoid expressing the opinion that the world has indeed gone to pieces, one has the almost surrealistic spectacle of a man who comes to announce to a perfectly flabbergasted audience that man has turned to beast, that the scientists playing with matches may well blow up the whole planet, or that millions in Europe are condemned to slow death because they have no "valid papers." And after these things are said, which cannot but create an atmosphere of tragic silence if they are understood at all, lo, there comes the announcer of the world's end with *his* solution, a tiny little bit of a darling solution, couched in paragraphs one, two, three, with sub-divisions A,B,C,D,—a bridge of matches to be thrown over the abyss that has cut the world in two, or a set of toothpicks to perform a major surgical operation. It's exactly like advertising: The world goes to the dogs, everything is dark, but we here at the factory have a new toothpaste that will brighten your smile.

I wonder if the "constructivists" have ever paused long enough to consider what would happen in the other fields of criticism if their principles were suddenly accepted. For example, music. Now, when a serious musical critic dismisses a symphony as bad, and gives only the reasons why it does not hold together musically, that is rightly called "criticism." If the same musical critic announced the next day that he has composed a symphony of his own, that would be rightly referred to as a symphony of his own. But if upon presenting his own composition to the public, he said: "This music here is a constructive criticism of the symphony criticized by me yesterday," he would rightly be sent to the unholiest of places and criticized, not once but twice: first as a critic who does not keep his place, and secondly as a composer who pretends to be exempt from criticism because, until yesterday, he was a critic too.

And we may easily imagine what would happen to an art critic who, in a supreme effort to be constructive, asked the Fifty-seventh Street galleries to reserve space on their walls near the paintings he is about to criticize, for his own constructive canvases.

It would seem, from the above two examples, that, in the arts

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at least, the substitution of the critic's own work for the one criticized by him is an act of intellectual despotism of the worst kind rather than an act of constructiveness.

Unfortunately, this is just what most magazine editors, forum moderators and other such people exact from the critic as a proof of his respect for the people or theories he criticized. But if the despotic character of this kind of constructiveness has escaped the attention of the well-meaning but weak defenders of the democratic process in such matters, it has certainly not escaped the attention of those who so successfully work to kill all freedom and whose past successes cost the world so many lives.

In fact, this very type of constructive criticism was developed by Mussolini, Hitler, and, much more efficiently than by those two, by Stalin, into a perfect safety-valve of thought control. It is called "criticism *within* the system" as opposed to "criticism *of* the system." As a form of cheating, it is practically as old as the world itself, but, given the tools of Progress, like all the bad things in the world, it has progressed magnificently in modern times. The great advantage of this form of criticism lies in the fact that, by its very nature, it presupposes and reaffirms, each time it is exercised, the assumption that it is in the power of the authorities to correct the "mistakes" which form the object of criticism. Besides, it rules out from the very beginning the hypothesis that the presence of those authorities is in itself the mistake behind all the "mistakes." Thus, for example, the laziness and inefficiency of bureaucracy is harshly criticized in Russia, but no one is allowed to say that the bureaucratic state itself is a crime, and he who instituted it a criminal.

In fascist Italy the thing took on the form of a real comedy. Anyone could invent his own personal brand of fascism, and attack public officials, even violently, for believing that fascism was something else. On one point alone they were not allowed to disagree: fascism was good and indispensable. While in reality it was neither, and the only criticism worth a thinker's salt would have been precisely this.

To illustrate the constructive double-talk that works so well in Russia, we may summarize it into an imaginary dialogue between a serious critic and Stalin. The serious critic would say only one thing to Stalin: "We, the Russian people do not want these chains."

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To which Stalin would promptly reply, "You are perfectly right. I will give you better ones."

"We don't want better ones," retorts the critic at this point, "we want none at all."

"You are a pessimist, a negativist, a destructive critic," is Stalin's reply. "You do not believe that I am here to help you. If you tell me all your grievances *concretely,* I may help you, but if you insist on asking for the impossible, I will have to eliminate you."

Obviously enough, the "impossible" here is the hypothesis that Stalin eliminate himself. But long before any discussion may reach this danger point in Russia, there is always someone whose specific job it is to steer the debate in the direction of "concrete objectives," that is, on how to best fasten the chains so that the individual limb may suffer least, and they really talk as if that were a kind of progress toward freedom. The mere hypothesis that there may have been a time when chains were simply not fastened on to people's limbs, is discredited as "unscientific" or "unrealistic." (In our democratic world we would get the same answer from an Immigration official if we told him the fairy tale that once upon a time there were no passports.) Now, in Russia, right after the debate has finished subverting all sense of proportions in the debaters themselves, so that they don't understand what they are talking about, there is always a speech in which the "findings" are authoritatively summarized by those in charge. In the hypothesis invented by us, some great Professor of Sociology would say: "In former centuries the science of chains was in its infancy. Useless cruelty, sadism and inefficiency accompanied this social function. Besides, some people thought that they themselves needed no chains, and that is why they were indifferent to the well-being of those kept in chains by them. Now, with our socialized chains, we have made great progress, and we will make more. This is the way to freedom. We are all here for the same purpose, so let us do our work efficiently. Anyone is welcome to suggest improvements and denounce errors, but we will not tolerate those idle elements who seem unable to say anything but 'We want freedom *now.*' "

After which, everyone will agree that the disturbers must be executed on the spot, as subversive elements. And subversive elements

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they most certainly are, because, when basic values are subverted commonsense is subversion.

Now, if this kind of reasoning can and must horrify us in the Russian people of today, even the faintest traces of it should horrify us in ourselves. We may pity the Russians and think that, once the heavy stone of terror is removed from their hearts, their minds may again learn to walk straight down the path of logic. Here, in America, where the heart is still free, why should the mind, without any compulsion from the outside, produce and keep such a solid structure of conformism? What should we think of the individual who inflicts upon himself this kind of punishment, gratuitously abdicating the exercise of intelligence, and for reasons appallingly weak?

The idea that all things can be improved and that therefore our best efforts should be directed toward improving things, is typical of the Helen Hokinson type of clubwoman.

The idea that only good things can be *improved*, while bad things are made worse by improvement and that, consequently, our first effort should be directed to finding out whether a thing is good or not, is typical of Socrates. The first leads to cowardliness, to dictated opinions, it is the best preliminary schooling for the acceptance of Communism.

The second leads to education, of the others as well as of oneself; it is the only existing antidote to any form of thought-control, and is, in fact, the thing most dreaded by the Communists as by all totalitarians.

Socrates cares; the Clubwoman does not. She wants the semblance of participation. She knows very well that there is no way of deciding in the course of a debate whether a certain technical improvement or constructive alternative in a highly specialized field is possible or not. (To be serious at all, the debate should in fact coincide with the life-work of specialists.) Too much technical knowledge, too little time. So it is very comforting to have a "constructive suggester" come around with a very complex affair which sounds perfectly fascinating to the least interested, and, if anyone in the audience, sensing the void of the whole thing, tries to bring back the "suggestor" to the fundamental issue in plain terms of common sense, he runs counter to the rules of politeness, and of course the sacred tenets of democracy in debating (let everyone speak, but for no longer than five minutes,

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so that no one will run the risk of making sense). Thus, while the faker goes on with his suggestions, the deeper he descends into obscurity, the greater the display of "participation." One sure way to tell when total darkness has been reached is from the emphatic tone of the ladies' voices, as they say: "I see, I see."

No. Between those who have debased criticism to the level of a silly game (Russian political "thinkers," American Clubwomen, both equally afraid of the truth) and those who have raised it to the level of a highly specialized, technical, boring, serious affair for experts only, never for outsiders (Government parasites the world over, all equally afraid of the truth), we conclude (and hope to be criticized for our conclusion), that:

1. Criticism *is* a game.
2. It is a *serious* game.
3. It is *everybody's* game.

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Elizabeth Hardwick

ELIZABETH BOWEN'S FICTION

The mere thought of criticizing Elizabeth Bowen's work makes one feel like one of the disaffected scoundrels in her novels who induce the death of the heart. The temptation to think of this author as she thinks of her heroines is almost irresistible. Her sunny reputation invites the cheerful, impressionistic remark; disinclination is rude; the air here is mild, polite, congratulatory. (She's not so perfect as Jane Austen, nor so original as Virginia Woolf, but how glad we are, etc.) Miss Bowen inspires confidence: the popular novelist, recently elected a Companion of the British Empire, with a London home in Regent's Park and a family house in County Cork, a sensitive, careful writer whose fineness of feeling is neatly ruffled with wit and laced with snobbery. E. Sackville-West speaks of her cleverness, her fresh and startling style; V. S. Pritchett thinks of her as a poet.

To go on from there is much more difficult. First, there is the well-bred woman of sensibility, moderately elegant, sensitive to differences in class, moralistic about taste, courtesy and fidelity; but there is another Elizabeth Bowen, a sturdy, determined writer, a romantic feminist who serves up a perennial dish: the tragedy of the Fine Girl and the Impossible Man. These are obviously women's books. The surface is urbane and complex, but unusually evasive, as though it were in some kind of secret struggle with the franker soul which has devised these stories of an innocent woman's maltreatment by the reprobate, the mysterious man, the weak or unfaithful lover. This theme, this bold heart throb, perhaps contributes to the popularity of the novels, and no doubt the decorative writing, the slow, oblique presentation of character are peculiarly necessary—without the latter adornments the sophisticated reader might reasonably question the whole matter. The style—Henry James, Virginia Woolf and

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Katherine Mansfield—is extraordinarily fluent and diverting; one hardly notices, under its spell, the bias of the content, the oppressive tidiness of the values. In these novels, love's prerogatives are real; ambivalence is wicked, a moral and also a social failure, for the conflicts are somehow a part of the class struggle and the author appears to be a conservative of nostalgic temperament.

The opinion, or sentiment, that occurs again and again in Elizabeth Bowen's fiction and which seems to have commanded the labors on her ancestral chronicle, *Bowen's Court,* is that to know *who* you are, to be close to your past, to feel the pride and obligations of family and place, are, if not the most exquisite and difficult attainments, a great source of personal and national virtue. These warm, sustaining emotions are found most frequently in the gentry and upper class; the disloyal, the insincere and unreliable are the homeless, the shapeless nobodys, the complacent, vapid middle class, the mysterious foreigner, the restless, self-loving *arriviste.* In the case of very young girls, such as Lois in *The Last September* and Portia in *The Death of the Heart,* the pattern is reversed and the family betrays. However, here the reversal is necessary for pathos, the thundershowers of pity that are the main weather of these two novels. By whom can a young girl be more miserably misunderstood, since she has little freedom of movement, than by her family? To be sure, Portia in *The Death of the Heart* has a more democratic fate: she is victimized impartially by all classes and with such supererogatory heartlessness that one yawns, occasionally, and suspects Portia really may be the nuisance her selfish betrayers believe. Even in this book, with its villainous cast, the real sewer of corruption is a young man, Eddie, who has overdrawn himself socially.

> He had been the brilliant child of an obscure home, and came up to Oxford ready to have his head turned. There he was taken up, played up, played about with, taken down, let down, finally sent down for one idiotic act. His appearance was charming: he had a proletarian, animal, quick grace. His manner, after a year of trying to get the pitch, had become bold, vivid and intimate.

As a sort of subhead to hereditary class, there occurs the abstract notion of Home, representing familiarities, allegiances, duties and affections; under Home there is a particularity, the actual house in

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which the character lives. From the Home or lack of it, one's house, enriching or blighting the senses and manners, Elizabeth Bowen creates a fantastic environmental psychology, as implacable, materialistic and mortifying as the verdict of a property assessor. For those who pass the test, and it is character that is at stake, the images are loving and generous. In *Bowen's Court* she writes:

Yes, here is the picture of peace—in the house, in the country round. Like all pictures, it does not quite correspond with any reality. Or, you may call the country a magic mirror, reflecting something that could not really exist. . . . I suppose that everyone, fighting or just enduring, now carries one private image—one peaceful scene—in his heart. Mine is Bowen's Court. War has made me this image out of a house built of anxious history.

And about Karen Michaelis in *The House in Paris*:

The Michaelis lived like a family in a pre-war novel in one of the tall, cream houses in Chester Terrace, Regent's Park. Their relatives and old friends, as nice as they were themselves, were rooted in the same soil. . . . That unconscious sereneness behind their living and letting live was what Karen's hungry or angry friends could not tolerate.

Frequently, the environmental ethic slips down a peg or two to include not only the family and the house but the very furnishings. By a complicated theology of objects the noble and the lost soul are defined. This is the moral intransigence of the interior decorator, the wrath of the goddess of the drapery and table setting. Peace is a well-lit drawing room, purity is light, airy, spacious and in its presence the glasses shine and the flowers are forever fresh. The guilty lead an uneasy existence among the thick, dark, impersonal objects in a furnished room (Eddie in *The Death of the Heart*); or communicate rudely with family members by means of a speaking tube (Markie in *To the North*); or bear upon their souls the terrible scar of one of those boy's dens, in which the coins, birds' eggs, trophies and snapshots of youth are kept intact by a vulgar family (Robert Kelway in *The Heat of the Day*).

In *The Heat of the Day,* Miss Bowen's recent novel, the limitations of these sentiments are most painful. This is the story of a personable man of reasonably typical experience who betrays his country to the Nazis. No doubt such a decision for a man like Robert Kel-

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way is incomprehensible—insanity, depravity, or misplaced cupidity, something cruel and hardening that refuses to melt into its origins might be the only answer. Only a handful of Englishmen out of millions openly supported the Nazis, but Miss Bowen hardly seems to recognize the peculiarity of her situation. She looks at the inscrutable world with a disparaging glance, confident that it too is a matter of class breeding.

Robert Kelway seems both unfamiliar with and embarrassed by what he is supposed to be as "English," as thoroughly discomfited by an existence as grotesque as the author herself. His manner has the dreamlike, muddled and baffled quality of an actor badly miscast in a role and trying to say, "... look at your 'free' suckers, your democracy letting them slump from the cradle to the grave," we feel him wince, wave and shrug; this is clearly not his line. But these few dogmatic utterances are mere fillers and the real motives for his treason are found back home, nesting behind the shrubbery and bird baths. It is not Robert Kelway, the traitor, in the fact that his bumptious middle-class family thinks of its home only as a poor investment, a saleable commodity to which they are doomed because it would be a disgrace not to sell for more than they gave. Stella Rodney, the heroine, meeting her lover's family for the first time and hearing their conversation about selling the house, thinks, "How can they [the Kelways] live, in a place that has for years been asking to be sold from over and out?" Stella is gentry by extraction and, though upset by the war and private circumstance, has retained her identity and pride. "A handsome derelict gateway opening on to grass and repeated memorials round the walls of a church still gave some sort of locale, however distant, to what had been her unmarried home." She is appalled by the Kelways and they are an unappetizing lot, bulky, clumsy people, though the historical significance of their watch-dog snappishness is not apparent to me. The author seems to feel that for all its overweening middle-class vanity this family (and the middle class too?) is socially and humanly menacing; it is a dangerous weevil, "suspended in the middle of nothing." Robert Kelway, then, has nothing to defend, neither his own kind nor his country; his indifference to the fate of England is symbolized by his willingness to sell (sell out?) his family house.

It is impossible, I think, to exaggerate the stubborn inadequacy

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of this motivation for treason. You feel as if you'd witnessed a fascinating crime and then heard the neighbors, rocking in their porch chairs, explaining, "I'm not surprised. That boy never appreciated his home!" Aside from the amount of "bad taste," vulgarity, discomfort, nothingness, useless property and vexing poverty vigorously defended by both sides in every war, Miss Bowen is too cautious to mention the one thing that *might* have motivated Robert Kelway, anti-Semitism, since it is hard to see what else the Nazis had to export to England and America. (Nobody took the body building exercises seriously.) *The Heat of the Day* is a curiously sentimental and confused reflection on a deplorable family with a stunted sense of the emotional value of property; and that this is the true theme is elaborately and tediously acknowledged by the subplot, which has to do with an estate in Ireland inherited by Stella Rodney's son. As a political novel, or a commentary on the English middle class, or a character novel, except for the engaging treatment of Stella Rodney, it is too impalpable to be held in the mind.

The House in Paris is widely esteemed, or at least I *believe* that to be the case. (Nothing is more difficult to track down than Miss Bowen's true reputation. Praise, so far as I have read, is indefinite and generally brief, a quick smile from Connolly, Pritchett or E. Sackville-West. Animadversion is equally curt. I have the feeling the *Scrutiny* people lump Miss Bowen with such writers as Rose Macauley and Rosamund Lehmann.) The mystery and witchery in *The House in Paris,* the sinister French boarding house, the unfathomable Mme. Fisher, and the farouche, precocious children are somewhat spurious and overwrought, in contrast to the love affair in the center of the novel which is a shy and incomplete Jamesian international episode. Karen Michaelis, wealthy, family-loving, rooted English girl, falls in love with Max Ebhart, a French Jew of highly conventionalized conception: neurotic, homeless, intelligent, nervous, ambitious. ("I cannot live in a love affair, I am busy and grasping. I am not English; you know I have no humor to cushion myself with; I am nervous all the time.") Max is literally and symbolically homeless; Karen feels with him "more cut off from her own country than if they had been in Peru." Max commits suicide and Karen bears his child illegitimately. Max is the most sympathetically treated of Miss Bowen's major male

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characters, though not the most interesting. He is spared the contempt usually heaped upon the men, perhaps because he is not a person at all but a captivated spirit, enchained by the wicked Mme. Fisher. Of course Karen will not marry him; he is neither free nor real enough to marry anyone; he is an appealing, romantic threat, an *image* that excites and haunts a young girl's mind on the eve of her marriage to the Right Man. The book has the suggestiveness and improbability of a dream.

The most striking thing about Miss Bowen's novels is that the attitudes and generalities which establish the tone, the more weighty reflections on status and character, either contradict or have nothing to do with the action. This author, as Mme. de Sévigné said of herself, is often very far from being entirely of her own opinion. Her typical heroines (Karen in *The House in Paris,* Emmeline in *To the North,* Stella in *The Heat of the Day*) are described as well-bred, calm, honest and attractive; they represent class and family virtue, and yet we can understand their actions only in terms of bohemia, that land no parent, relative or property owner ever enters. The girls are unconventional and daring, not in the manner of artists or intellectuals, but in the more starchy, unprogrammatic way of independent, competent business women. In love they lack caution and, to some degree, conscience; with fanatical doggedness they deceive their parents and friends, have illegitimate children, open affairs with men they know little about, and even commit murder, or at least that is the way I interpret the ending of *To the North.* All of the neat, loving domestic purity of the heroine's background does not keep her away from the sordid scenery of weekend cottages and hotel rooms. And it is almost always the heroine who passes beyond the expected and discreet in love; indeed, the man's "betrayal" is simply his embarrassment, his disabling reasonableness, his unwillingness to "live on the top of the Alps."

The main characteristic of the heroines is incuriosity. We can sympathize with the traitor Robert Kelway when he tells Stella he thought she knew of his secret activities. "How could she not have suspected *something?*" he and the reader wonder. Markie in *To the North* tells Emmeline, as they take off for a weekend in Paris, that he doesn't wish to marry her, but for some reason she discounts his frank admission; Eddie in *The Death of the Heart* is understandably

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astonished that Portia should have imagined he loved her. The heroines are bemused, credulous, and humorless; their high-mindedness is often only a fantastic, unrelenting literalness; we can seem to hear their desperate pleading going on long after the disaster, "But I thought you said—" and "How could you when—?" or "But you promised—."

The men are complex, ambiguous, dissatisfied—qualities Miss Bowen looks upon with finicky contempt. At the best, this contempt gives a structure to the story and a resolution to the plot. Elizabeth Bowen's novels *end,* usually in the death of the man (*The House in Paris, The Last Septemoer, The Heat of the Day, To the North.*) One cannot help but see these concluding immolations as the "woman's revenge," condign punishment for male weakness, hesitation and disingenuousness. And if there is something chilling and merciless in these finales, no one can doubt they give prodigal relief to both feminine sentiment and womanly outrage.

Since Miss Bowen's purest talent is for the simple love story, she seems to me at her best in *To the North,* a harsh, terrifying and unaffected book. Even the title avoids the sentimental disguise of the other novels and candidly indicates the zero temperature at which these love affairs end. Emmeline, the heroine, has the charm of an admission; she is in the flesh what you have felt the other heroines really were, no matter what the author pretended. Fresh, competent (a business of her own), myopic, always reaching for her glasses or seeing the world through a pleasant, deceptive haze, exorbitantly insensitive to the true character of her lover, unwilling to countenance his frantic warnings, idealistic, cruel when disabused, she hounds the fleeing man, and finally, when she can no longer avoid facing the truth, gets him into a car and drives so fast they are both killed. This book has the finished, clean and moving success the others merely hope to achieve by considerable cant about taste and manners.

I cannot share E. Sackville-West's statement in *Horizon* that "Elizabeth Bowen is already assured of a superior place in any civilization capable of appreciating, say, *Middlemarch.*" This critic might have gone through the whole of *The Cambridge History* without finding a comparison more unflattering to Miss Bowen. But I wonder if these comparisons are meant to be taken seriously. They are

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apparently an accepted form of discourse and whenever the subject under discussion is a woman writer we can always expect to pass the time of day with chatter about Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot.

Just where Elizabeth Bowen "belongs" I cannot say. Readable, gifted, the very equanimity of her work makes criticism difficult. In a relaxed mood, she offers one the satisfaction of unabashed tears, an emotional evening in which love retains all its old sovereign rights, and the final pleasure of witnessing the bad end to which the inconstant come. As in an opera libretto you must take the roles on faith—a grunt of satire or a shiver of commonsense on the spectator's part, would be enough to disrupt the performance and bring the pretty scenery down upon the soprano's head.

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Hisaye Yamamoto

SEVENTEEN SYLLABLES

The first Rosie knew that her mother had taken to writing poems was one evening when she finished one and read it aloud for her daughter's approval. It was about cats, and Rosie pretended to understand it thoroughly and appreciate it no end, partly because she hesitated to disillusion her mother about the quantity and quality of Japanese she had learned in all the years now that she had been going to Japanese school every Saturday (and Wednesday, too, in the Summer). Even so, her mother must have been skeptical about the depth of Rosie's understanding, because she explained afterwards about the kind of poem she was trying to write.

See, Rosie, she said, it was a *haiku,* a poem in which she must pack all her meaning into seventeen syllables only, which were divided into three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. In the one she had just read, she had tried to capture the charm of a kitten, as well as comment on the superstition that owning a cat of three colors meant good luck.

"Yes, yes, I understand. How utterly lovely," Rosie said, and her mother, either satisfied or seeing through the deception and resigned, went back to composing.

The truth was that Rosie was lazy; English lay ready on the tongue but Japanese had to be searched for and examined, and even then put forth tentatively (probably to meet with laughter). It was so much easier to say yes, yes, even when one meant no, no. Besides, this was what was in her mind to say: I was looking through one of your magazines from Japan last night, Mother, and towards the back I found some *haiku* in English that delighted me. There was one that made me giggle off and on until I fell asleep—

It is morning, and lo!
I lie awake, comme il faut,
sighing for some dough.

Now, how to reach her mother, how to communicate the mel-

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ancholy song? Rosie knew formal Japanese by fits and starts, her mother had even less English, no French. It was much more possible to say yes, yes.

It developed that her mother was writing the *haiku* for a daily newspaper, the *Mainichi Shinbun,* that was published in San Francisco. Los Angeles, to be sure, was closer to the farming community in which the Hayashi family lived and several Japanese vernaculars were printed there, but Rosie's parents said they preferred the tone of the northern paper. Once a week, the *Mainichi* would have a section devoted to *haiku,* and her mother became an extravagant contributor, taking for herself the blossoming pen name, Umé Hanazono.

So Rosie and her father lived for awhile with two women, her mother and Umé Hanazono. Her mother (Tomé Hayashi by name) kept house, cooked, washed, and, along with her husband and the Carrascos, the Mexican family hired for the harvest, did her ample share of picking tomatoes out in the sweltering fields and boxing them in tidy strata in the cool packing shed. Umé Hanazono, who came to life after the dinner dishes were done, was an earnest, muttering stranger who often neglected speaking when spoken to and stayed busy at the parlor table as late as midnight scribbling with pencil on scratch paper or carefully copying characters on good paper with her fat, pale green Parker.

This new interest had some repercussions on the household routine. Before, Rosie had been accustomed to her parents and herself taking their hot baths early and going to bed almost immediately afterwards, unless her parents challenged each other to a game of flower cards or unless company dropped in. Now, if her father wanted to play cards, he had to resort to solitaire (at which he always cheated fearlessly), and if a group of friends came over, it was bound to contain someone who was also writing *haiku,* and the small assemblage would be split in two, her father entertaining the non-literary members and her mother comparing ecstatic notes with the visiting poet.

If they went out, it was more of the same thing. But Umé Hanazono's life span, even for a poet's, was very brief—perhaps three months at most.

One night they went over to see the Hayano family in the

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neighboring town to the west, an adventure both painful and attractive to Rosie. It was attractive because there were four Hayano girls, all lovely and each one named after a season of the year (Haru, Natsu, Aki, Fuyu), painful because something had been wrong with Mrs. Hayano ever since the birth of her first child. Rosie would sometimes watch Mrs. Hayano, reputed to have been the belle of her native village, making her way about a room, stooped, slowly shuffling, violently trembling (*always* trembling), and she would be reminded that this woman, in this same condition, had carried and given issue to three babies. She would look wonderingly at Mr. Hayano, handsome, tall, and strong, and she would look at her four pretty friends. But it was not a matter she could come to any decision about.

On this visit, however, Mrs. Hayano sat all evening in the rocker, as motionless and unobtrusive as it was possible for her to be, and Rosie found the greater part of the evening practically anaesthetic. Too, Rosie spent most of it in the girls' room, because Haru, the garrulous one, said almost as soon as the bows and other greetings were over, "Oh, you must see my new coat!"

It was a pale plaid of grey, sand, and blue, with an enormous collar, and Rosie, seeing nothing special in it, said, "Gee, how nice."

"Nice?" said Haru, indignantly. "Is that all you can say about it? It's gorgeous! And so cheap, too. Only seventeen-ninety-eight, because it was a sale. The saleslady said it was twenty-five dollars regular."

"Gee," said Rosie. Natsu, who never said much and when she said anything said it shyly, fingered the coat covetously and Haru pulled it away.

"Mine," she said, putting it on. She minced in the aisle between the two large beds and smiled happily. "Let's see how your mother likes it."

She broke into the front room and the adult conversation, and went to stand in front of Rosie's mother, while the rest watched from the door. Rosie's mother was properly envious. "May I inherit it when you're through with it?"

Haru, pleased, giggled and said yes, she could, but Natsu reminded gravely from the door, "You promised me, Haru."

Everyone laughed but Natsu, who shamefacedly retreated into the bedroom. Haru came in laughing, taking off the coat. "We

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were only kidding, Natsu," she said. "Here, you try it on now."

After Natsu buttoned herself into the coat, inspected herself solemnly in the bureau mirror, and reluctantly shed it, Rosie, Aki, and Fuyu got their turns, and Fuyu, who was eight, drowned in it while her sisters and Rosie doubled up in amusement. They all went into the front room later, because Haru's mother quaveringly called to her to fix the tea and rice cakes and open a can of sliced peaches for everybody. Rosie noticed that her mother and Mr. Hayano were talking together at the little table—they were discussing a *haiku* that Mr. Hayano was planning to send to the *Mainichi*, while her father was sitting at one end of the sofa looking through a copy of *Life*, the new picture magazine. Occasionally, her father would comment on a photograph, holding it toward Mrs. Hayano and speaking to her as he always did—loudly, as though he thought someone such as she must surely be at least a trifle deaf also.

The five girls had their refreshments at the kitchen table, and it was while Rosie was showing the sisters her trick of swallowing peach slices without chewing (she chased each slippery crescent down with a swig of tea) that her father brought his empty teacup and untouched saucer to the sink and said, "Come on, Rosie, we're going home now."

"Already?" asked Rosie.

"Work tomorrow," he said.

He sounded irritated, and Rosie, puzzled, gulped one last yellow slice and stood up to go, while the sisters began protesting, as was their wont.

"We have to get up at five-thirty," he told them, going into the front room quickly, so that they did not have their usual chance to hang onto his hands and plead for an extension of time.

Rosie, following, saw that her mother and Mr. Hayano were sipping tea and still talking together, while Mrs. Hayano concentrated, quivering, on raising the handleless Japanese cup to her lips with both her hands and lowering it back to her lap. Her father, saying nothing, went out the door, onto the bright porch, and down the steps. Her mother looked up and asked, "Where is he going?"

"Where is he going?" Rosie said. "He said we were going home now."

"Going home?" Her mother looked with embarrassment at Mr.

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Hayano and his absorbed wife and then forced a smile. "He must be tired," she said.

Haru was not giving up yet. "May Rosie stay overnight?" she asked, and Natsu, Aki, and Fuyu came to reinforce their sister's plea by helping her make a circle around Rosie's mother. Rosie, for once, having no desire to stay, was relieved when her mother, apologizing to the perturbed Mr. and Mrs. Hayano for her father's abruptness at the same time, managed to shake her head no at the quartet, kindly but adamant, so that they broke their circle to let her go.

Rosie's father looked ahead into the windshield as the two joined him. "I'm sorry," her mother said. "You must be tired." Her father, stepping on the starter, said nothing. "You know how I get when it's *haiku,*" she continued, "I forget what time it is." He only grunted.

As they rode homeward, silently, Rosie, sitting between, felt a rush of hate for both, for her mother for begging, for her father for denying her mother. I wish this old Ford would crash, right now, she thought, then immediately, no, no, I wish my father would laugh, but it was too late: already the vision had passed through her mind of the green pick-up crumpled in the dark against one of the mighty eucalyptus trees they were just riding past, of the three contorted, bleeding bodies, one of them hers.

Rosie ran between two patches of tomatoes, her heart working more rambunctiously than she had ever known it to. How lucky it was that Aunt Taka and Uncle Gimpachi had come tonight, though, how very lucky. Otherwise, she might not have really kept her half-promise to meet Jesús Carrasco. Jesús, who was going to be a senior in September at the same school she went to, and his parents were the ones helping with the tomatoes this year. She and Jesús, who hardly remembered seeing each other at Cleveland high, where there were so many other people and two whole grades between them, had become great friends this Summer—he always had a joke for her when he periodically drove the loaded pick-up up from the fields to the shed where she was usually sorting while her mother and father did the packing, and they laughed a great deal together over infinitesimal repartee during the afternoon break for chilled watermelon or ice cream in the shade of the shed.

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What she enjoyed most was racing him to see which could finish picking a double row first. He, who could work faster, would tease her by slowing down until she thought she would surely pass him this time, then speeding up furiously to leave her several sprawling vines behind. Once he had made her screech hideously by crossing over, while her back was turned, to place atop the tomatoes in her green-stained bucket a truly monstrous, pale green worm (it had looked more like an infant snake). And it was when they had finished a contest this morning, after she had pantingly pointed a green finger at the immature tomatoes evident in the lugs at the end of his row and he had returned the accusation (with justice), that he had startlingly brought up the matter of their possibly meeting outside the range of both their parents' dubious eyes.

"What for?" she had asked.

"I've got a secret I want to tell you," he said.

"Tell me now," she demanded.

"It won't be ready till tonight," he said.

She laughed. "Tell me tomorrow then."

"It'll be gone tomorrow," he threatened.

"Well, for seven hakes, what is it?" she had asked, more than twice, and when he had suggested that the packing shed would be an appropriate place to find out, she had cautiously answered maybe. She had not been certain she was going to keep the appointment until the arrival of her mother's sister and her husband. Their coming seemed a sort of signal of permission, of grace, and she had definitely made up her mind to lie and leave as she was bowing them welcome.

So, as soon as everyone appeared settled back for the evening, she announced loudly that she was going to the privy outside, "I'm going to the *benjo!*" and slipped out the door. And now that she was actually on her way, her heart pumped in such an undisciplined way that she could hear it with her ears. It's because I'm running, she told herself, slowing to a walk. The shed was up ahead, one more patch away, in the middle of the fields. Its bulk, looming in the dimness, took on a sinisterness that was funny when Rosie reminded herself that it was only a wooden frame with a canvas roof and three canvas walls that made a slapping noise on breezy days.

Jesús was sitting on the narrow plank that was the sorting platform and she went around to the other side and jumped backwards

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to seat herself on the rim of a packing stand. "Well, tell me," she said, without greeting, thinking her voice sounded reassuringly [illegible]

"I saw you coming out the door," Jesús said. "I heard you running part of the way, too."

"Uh-huh," Rosie said. "Now tell me the secret."

"I was afraid you wouldn't come," he said.

Rosie delved around on the chicken-wire bottom of the stall for number two tomatoes, ripe, which she was coming to like, and came up with a left-over that felt edible. She bit into it and began sucking out the pulp and seeds. "I'm here," she pointed out.

"Rosie, are you sorry you came?"

"Sorry? What for?" she said. "You said you were going to tell me something."

"I will. I will," Jesús said, but his voice contained disappointment, and Rosie, fleetingly, felt the older of the two, realizing a brand-new power which vanished without category under her recognition.

"I have to go back in a minute," she said. "My aunt and uncle are here from Wintersburg. I told them I was going to the privy."

Jesús laughed. "You funny thing," he said. "You shy one."

"Just because you have a bathroom *inside*," Rosie said. "Come on, tell me."

Chuckling, Jesús came around to lean on the stand facing her. They still could not see each other very clearly, but Rosie noticed that Jesús became very sober again as he took the yellow square from her hand and dropped it back into the stall. When he took hold of her empty hand, she could find no words to protest; her vocabulary had become distressingly constricted and she thought desperately that all that remained intact now was yes and no and oh and even these few sounds would not easily come. Then, kneeling by Jesús, Rosie fell, for the first time, entirely victim to a delectable beyond speech. But the terrible, beautiful sensation lasted no more than a second, and the reality of Jesús' lips and tongue and teeth and hands made her pull away with such strength that she nearly tumbled.

Rosie stopped running as she approached the lights from the windows of home. How long since she had left? She could not guess, but gasping yet, she went to the privy in back and locked herself in

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Her own breathing deafened her in the dark, close space, and she sat and waited until she could hear at last the nightly calling of the frogs and crickets. Even then, all she could think to say was oh, no, and the pressure of Jesus' face against her face would not leave.

No one had missed her in the parlor, however, and Rosie walked in and through quickly, announcing that she was next going to take a bath. "Your father's in the bathhouse," her mother said, and Rosie, in her room, recalled that she had not seen him when she entered. There had been only Aunt Taka and Uncle Gimpachi with her mother at the table, drinking tea. She got her robe and straw sandals and crossed the parlor again to go outside. Her mother was telling them about the *haiku* competition in the *Mainichi* and the poem she had entered.

Rosie met her father coming out of the bathhouse. "Are you through, Father?" she asked. "I was going to ask you to scrub my back."

"Scrub your own back," he said shortly, going toward the main house.

"What have I done now?" she yelled after him. She suddenly felt like crying at the joy of yelling. But he did not answer, and she went into the bathhouse. Turning on the dangling light, she removed her clothes and T-shirt and threw them in the big carton for dirty clothes standing next to the washing machine. Her other things she took with her into the bath compartment to wash after her bath. After she had scooped a bowl of hot water from the square wooden tub, she sat on the grey cement of the floor and soaped herself at exaggerated length, singing, "Red Sails in the Sunset" at the top of her voice and using *na-na-na* where she suspected her words. Then, splashing, still singing, for she was possessed by the notion that any attempt now to analyze would result in spoilage and she believed that the larger her volume the less she would be able to hear herself think, she scrubbed more hot water and poured it on until she was free of suds. Only then did she allow herself to step into the steaming vat, lowering first her feet, the remainder of her body inch by inch until the water no longer sang and she could move around at will.

She took a long time soaking, afterwards remembering to go around to the side to stoke the embers of the tin-lined fireplace beneath the tub and to throw on a few more sticks so that the water might

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keep its heat for her mother, and when she finally returned to the parlor, she found her mother still talking *haiku* with her aunt and uncle, the three of them on another round of tea. Her father was nowhere in sight.

At Japanese school the next day (Wednesday, it was), Rosie was grave and giddy by turns. Preoccupied at her desk in the row for students on Book Eight, she made up for it at recess by performing wild mimicry for the benefit of her friend Chizuko. She held her nose and whined a witticism or two in what she considered was the manner of Fred Allen; she assumed intoxication and a British accent to go over the climax of the Rudy Vallee recording of the pub conversation about William Ewart Gladstone; she was the child Shirley Temple piping, "On the Good Ship Lollipop"; she was the gentleman soprano of the Four Inkspots trilling, "If I Didn't Care." And she felt reasonably satisfied when Chizuko wept and gasped, "Oh, Rosie, you ought to be in the movies!"

Her father came after her at noon, bringing her sandwiches of minced ham and two nectarines to eat while she rode, so that she could pitch right into the sorting when they got home. The lugs were piling up, he said, and the ripe tomatoes in them would probably have to be taken to the cannery tomorrow if they were not ready for the produce haulers tonight. "This heat's not doing them any good. And we've got no time for a break today."

It *was* hot, probably the hottest day of the year, and Rosie's blouse stuck damply to her back even under the protection of the canvas. But she worked as efficiently as a flawless machine and kept the stalls heaped, with one part of her mind listening in to the parental murmuring about the heat and the tomatoes and with another part planning the exact words she would say to Jesús when he drove up with the first load of the afternoon. But when at last she saw that the pick-up was coming, her hands went berserk and the tomatoes started falling in the wrong stalls, and her father said, "Hey, hey! Rosie, watch what you're doing!"

"Well, I have to go to the *benjo,*" she said, hiding panic.

"Go in the weeds over there," he said, only half-joking.

"Oh, Father!" she protested.

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"Oh, go on home," her mother said. "We'll make out for awhile."

In the privy, Rosie peered through a knothole toward the fields, watching as much as she could of Jesús. Happily she thought she saw him look in the direction of the house from time to time before he finished unloading and went back toward the patch where his mother and father worked. As she was heading for the shed, a very presentable black car purred up the dirt driveway to the house and its driver motioned to her. Was this the Hayashi home, he wanted to know. She nodded. Was she a Hayashi? Yes, she said, thinking that he was a good-looking man. He got out of the car with a huge, flat package and she saw that he warmly wore a business suit. "I have something here for your mother then," he said, in a more elegant Japanese than she was used to.

She told him where her mother was and he came along with her, patting his face with an immaculate white handkerchief and saying something about the coolness of San Francisco. To her surprised mother and father, he bowed and introduced himself as, among other things, the *haiku* editor of the *Mainichi Shinbun*, saying that since he had been coming as far as Los Angeles anyway, he had decided to bring her the first prize she had won in the recent contest.

"First prize?" her mother echoed, believing and not believing, pleased and overwhelmed. Handed the package with a bow, she bobbed her head up and down numerous times to express her utter gratitude.

"It is nothing much," he added, "but I hope it will serve as a token of our great appreciation for your contributions and our great admiration of your considerable talent."

"I am not worthy," she said, falling easily into his style. "It is I who should make some sign of my humble thanks for being permitted to contribute."

"No, no, to the contrary," he said, bowing again.

But Rosie's mother insisted, and then saying that she knew she was being unorthodox, she asked if she might open the package because her curiosity was so great. Certainly she might. In fact, he would like her reaction to it, for personally, it was one of his favorite *Hiroshiges*.

Rosie thought it was a pleasant picture, which looked to have

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been sketched with delicate quickness. There were pink clouds, containing some graceful calligraphy, and a sea, that was a pale blue except at the edges, containing four sampans with indications of people in them. Pines edged the water and on the far-off beach there was a cluster of thatched huts towered over by pine-dotted mountains of grey and blue. The frame was scalloped and gilt.

After Rosie's mother pronounced it without peer and somewhat prodded her father into nodding agreement, she said Mr. Kuroda must at least have a cup of tea, after coming all this way, and although Mr. Kuroda did not want to impose, he soon agreed that a cup of tea would be refreshing and went along with her to the house, carrying the picture for her.

"Ha, your mother's crazy!" Rosie's father said, and Rosie laughed uneasily as she resumed judgment on the tomatoes. She had emptied the bags when he broke into an imaginary conversation with Jesús to tell her to go and remind her mother of the tomatoes, and she went slowly.

Mr. Kuroda was in his shirtsleeves expounding some *haiku* theory as he munched a rice cake, and her mother was rapt. Abashed in the great man's presence, Rosie stood next to her mother's chair until her mother looked up inquiringly, and then she started to whisper the message, but her mother pushed her gently away and reproached, "You are not being very polite to our guest."

"Father says the tomatoes . . . " Rosie said aloud, smiling foolishly.

"Tell him I shall only be a minute," her mother said, speaking the language of Mr. Kuroda.

When Rosie carried the reply to her father, he did not seem to hear and she said again, "Mother says she'll be back in a minute."

"All right, all right," he nodded, and they worked again in silence. But suddenly, her father uttered an incredible noise, exactly like the cork of a bottle popping, and the next Rosie knew, he was stalking angrily toward the house, almost running, in fact, and she chased after him crying, "Father! Father! What are you going to do?"

He stopped long enough to order her back to the shed. "Never mind!" he shouted. "Get on with the sorting!"

And from the place in the fields where she stood, frightened and

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vacillating, Rosie saw her father enter the house. Soon Mr. Kuroda came out alone, putting on his coat. Mr. Kuroda got into his car and backed out down the driveway, onto the highway. Next her father emerged, also alone, something in his arms (it was the picture, she realized), and, going over to the bathhouse woodpile, he threw the picture on the ground and picked up the axe. Smashing the picture, glass and all (she heard the explosion faintly), he reached over for the kerosene that was used to encourage the bath fire and poured it over the wreckage. I am dreaming, Rosie said to herself. I am dreaming, but her father, having made sure that his act of cremation was irrevocable, was even then returning to the fields.

Rosie ran past him and toward the house. What had become of her mother? She burst into the parlor and found her mother at the back window, watching the dying fire. They watched together until there remained only a feeble smoke under the blazing sun. Her mother was very calm.

"Do you know why I married your father?" she said, without turning.

"No," said Rosie. It was the most frightening question she had ever been called upon to answer. Don't tell me now, she wanted to say, tell me tomorrow, tell me next week, don't tell me today. But she knew she would be told now, that the telling would combine with the other violence of the hot afternoon to level her life, her world (so various, so beautiful, so new?) to the very ground.

It was like a story out of the magazines, illustrated in sepia, which she had consumed so greedily for a period until the information had somehow reached her that those wretchedly unhappy autobiographies, offered to her as the testimonials of living men and women, were largely inventions. Her mother, at nineteen, had come to America and married her father as an alternative to suicide.

At eighteen, she had been in love with the first son of one of the well-to-do families in her village. The two had met whenever and wherever they could, secretly, because it would not have done for his family to see him favor her—her father had no money; he was a dreamer and a gambler besides. She had learned she was with child; an excellent match had already been arranged for her lover. Deserted by her family, she had given premature birth to a stillborn son. It would be seventeen now. Her family did not turn her out, but she could

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no longer project herself in any direction without refreshing in them the memory of her indiscretion. She wrote to Aunt Taka, her favorite sister, in America, threatening to kill herself if Aunt Taka would not send for her. Aunt Taka hastily arranged a marriage with a young man, but lately arrived from Japan, of whom she knew, a young man of simple mind, it was said, but of kindly heart. The young man was never told why his unseen betrothed was so eager to hasten the day of meeting.

The story was told perfectly, with neither groping for words nor untoward passion. It was as though her mother had memorized it by heart, reciting it to herself so many times over that its nagging vileness had long since gone.

"I had a brother then?" Rosie asked, for this was what seemed to matter now; she would think about the other later, she assured herself, pushing back the illumination which threatened all that darkness that had hitherto been merely mysterious or even glamourous. "A half-brother?"

"Yes."

"I would have liked a brother," she said.

Suddenly, her mother knelt on the floor and took her by the wrists. "Rosie," she said urgently, "Promise me you will never marry!" Shocked more by the request than the revelation, Rosie stared at her mother's face. Jesus, Jesus, she called silently, not certain whether she was invoking the help of the son of the Carrascos or of God, until there returned sweetly the memory of Jesús' hand, how it had touched her and where. Still her mother waited for an answer, holding her wrists so tightly that her hands were going numb. She tried to pull free. Promise, her mother whispered fiercely, promise. Yes, yes, I promise, Rosie said. But for an instant she turned away, and her mother, hearing the familiar glib agreement, released her. Oh, you, you, you, her eyes and twisted mouth said, you fool. Rosie, covering her face, began at last to cry, and the embrace and consoling hand came much later than she expected.

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ART CHRONICLE

OUR PERIOD STYLE

Can we not take it then that the recovery of a true style in the visual arts, one in which once again building rules, and painting and sculpture serve, and one in which form is obviously representative of character, indicates the return of unity in society too? Granted that this new style often looks rather forbidding and seems to lack human warmth. But is not the same true of contemporary life? Here, too, amenities to which we have been used are being replaced by something more exacting and more elementary.—Nikolaus Pevsner: *An Outline of European Architecture* (Penguin Books, 1945).

The absence—without precedent, as far as we know—in 19th-century Europe of an independent contemporary style shared in common by sculpture, painting, architecture, decoration and design seems to have been prolonged until our day. Yet the situation is not really what it was. The last forty or fifty years have seen it remedied on the highest levels of our artistic and architectural production, and the artist or designer who works on those levels once again has available a style that encourages him to answer contemporary feeling with independence and at the same time prepares an audience, no matter how small, for his originality. It is perhaps because we accepted eclectic historicism from the first (why, is an interesting question) as the natural state of things in architecture and design that we do not now sufficiently celebrate the presence of a style that at last satisfies us integrally and conformably to everything new we have experienced since the 18th century.

"International style" architecture, Cubist and post-Cubist painting and sculpture, "modern" furniture and decoration and design are the manifestations of the new style. Conditioned by industrialism, it is native to our century, owes well-nigh nothing to the past, and the arts and crafts can draw energy from it as from a common fund whereby they fertilize and invigorate each other. Painting plays a curious role in this new style. Not that it is its sole creator—the style arose independently in architecture and would, I feel sure, have come to fruition there without painting's aid. But painting—Cubist painting—did serve to reveal the new style in architecture to itself, define some of its plastic ingredients and make

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their tenor explicit. And it also transmitted the style, single-handedly, to sculpture; as far as sculpture is concerned, the new style was created by painting, and by painting alone. Yet at the same time sculpture demonstrates more clearly than either painting or architecture those essential features of the new style that are shared by all the visual arts in common. This is why it would be best to describe the style through that art.

More directly and less ambiguously than painting and more nakedly than architecture, sculpture realizes the new notion of the work of visual art as an open, more or less transparent object whose effect lies mainly in its total design, its exhibited structure, and which relies relatively little on expressive details. The plastic means are flat planes, lines, and enclosed spaces rather than masses, volumes and modelling. The interest is in lines of force, thrusts, in the "activation" of empty space; there is also a great impulse, as in dancing—and also in modern engineering—to discount the law of gravity, which is done in sculpture by lifting the object from its base on wires or rods. A similar effect is made possible in architecture by the superior tensile strength of the new materials devised by industrial science.

The new sculpture emulates nature by offering a context in which entities are created by positional relations; the old sculpture emulated a nature that seemed to create through weight and solidity alone. The old sculptor, like the old architect, made his work a monolith more or less isolated from the space around it; the modern sculptor and the modern architect conceive of space more dynamically, as all-pervasive and all-embracing. And, as Nikolaus Pevsner puts it, inside and outside are interwoven. The artist no longer seals his figure or construction off from the rest of space behind an impenetrable surface, but instead permits space to enter into its core and the core to reach out into and organize the ambience.

J. M. Richards' and Elizabeth Mock's description of Frank Lloyd Wright's first "prairie houses," in their *Introduction to Modern Architecture* (Penguin Books, 1947, pp. 57-8), well illustrates the new unity of style among the visual arts; for, *mutatis mutandis*, it can be fittingly applied to the works of the Constructivists and other modern sculptors:

> . . . Space took on a life of its own. It became fluid, expansive, continuous from one room to another, and from inside to outside through bands of casement windows or great banks of glass doors. Terraces, perhaps and boldly cantilevered roofs all contributed the extraordinary effect of an interpenetration of interior and exterior space. Outside, materials were concentrated in large unbroken surfaces and the houses seemed

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composed of flat, independent planes, some horizontal, some vertical, some intersecting, some floating at different levels. . . . Thus began the process that might be called the dissolution of the wall. The wall is no longer the necessary psychological boundary of a building. It may be merely a transparent, scarcely noticeable transition between inside and outside, giving an illusion of limitless space to even the smallest interior. This breakdown of the Renaissance concept of windows as isolated holes-in-the-wall is an inevitable expression of our twentieth century consciousness of space as continuous . . . it was encouraged by the development of modern skeleton construction, in which walls support nothing, therefore can be wholly of glass.

The reader will notice that I have been led to use some of the same expressions as Mr. Richards and Mrs. Mock in order to describe modern sculpture.

What most essentially defines the new unity of style in architecture, sculpture and painting is, however, their common tendency to treat all *matter*, as distinguished from *space*, as two-dimensional. Matter is analyzed into points, lines and the surfaces of planes that are meant to be felt as without thickness and possessing the hypothetically absolute two-dimensionality of demonstrations in plane geometry. It is by virtue of this immateriality, this urge to reduce their plastic elements to the minimum of substance needed to bear form visibility, that modern architecture and sculpture can be with the greatest justice termed "abstract." If painting does not show a corresponding tendency to reduce the thickness of pigment it is because it is still engaged in emphasizing the primacy of the plane surface composed of paint and canvas as against the older conception of painting as an affair of illusion, transparent window effects, and effaced means. And in any case Cubist painting was the first to illustrate, if not embody, the new conception of matter as something which must be reduced, for the purposes of plastic art, to two dimensions, it gave us our first clear glimpse of the "open" object permeated by space and permeating space.

Gothic style, too, seemed to strive for immateriality. But where Gothic style "spiritualized" matter by challenging its weight, modern style "scientizes" it by resolving mass and weight into planes or fields of force and into guiding and limiting lines of space (which move horizontally as well as upwards; modern style has in general not too much feeling for the distinction between upwards and downwards: the best skyscrapers would look just as well stood upside down). The affinity between the new style in the visual arts and modern physical science should be obvious from the terms in which I have described the former. But it is not at all a matter of the modern artist being influenced by

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science and trying to illustrate its new explanation of the nature of matter; the artist works much more empirically than that and, regardless of what goes on in other fields, tries simply to make an aesthetically effective object in compliance with the demands of his own sensibility and that of his audience. His relation with science—or philosophy or religion—is owed to the fact that, in our age as in every other, the highest aesthetic sensibility rests on the same basic assumptions, conscious or unconscious, as to the nature of reality as does the advanced thinking contemporaneous with it. What the mechanism is by which such assumptions penetrate to all departments of culture, almost simultaneously it would seem, has not yet been satisfactorily explained, but that they do is indisputable. . . .

Our period presents a picture of discord, atomization, disintegration, unprincipled eclecticism, etc., etc. How then does the new unity of style in the visual arts fit into it? I can reply only by hazarding that the picture may be deceptive because incomplete. Despite all appearances to the contrary, our age may still contain a new principle of unity in itself; I seem to see one being generated empirically out of certain solutions dictated by the novel problems of an industrialized and urbanized society. This principle may not yet have been adequately argued in words, but I feel it to be already confirmed in art and technics—wherever man has to cope with matter. One of the prime causes of the ills of our age is, possibly, that it resists its own principle of unity.

The spirit or style of an age is seen at its most unmistakable in the *new* ways in which it shapes and handles physical substance. If so, the style of ours—and in this I see its principle of unity—is characterized by economy, directness and consistency in the fitting of means to ends: in a word, by the practice of rationalization. Rationalization in the industrial sense, a frightening idea by now, but so only because it has never been put into effect completely and courageously enough: as a method, that is, by which to determine ends as well as means. The new art style breathes rationalization. It makes more explicit and prominent than ever before that economy of means which has always been indispensable to successful works of art. It does not rationalize art—which is impossible—but it produces an art that answers the temper of men who know no better way of attaining an end than by the rationalization of every means thereto. This art is one of the few manifestations of our time uninflated by illegitimate content—no religion or mysticism or political certainties. And in its radical inadaptability to the uses of any interest, ideological or institutional, lies the most certain guarantee of the truth with which it expresses us.

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Integral efficiency is as lofty an ideal as any, and perhaps more real than any other. Its unfavorable associations are the vulgar ones. But only in art as yet, because art does not have to determine and can so well refuse to serve ends outside itself, has an appropriate vision of efficiency as an ideal been bodied forth, a vision of that complete and positive rationality which seems to me the only remedy for our present confusions.

Clement Greenberg

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BOOKS

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT: THE ROAD TO THE CASTLE

MAGISTER LUDI. By Hermann Hesse. Henry Holt. $5.00.
THE WOMAN OF ROME. By Alberto Moravia. Farrar, Straus. $3.50.
UNDER THE SUN OF SATAN. By Georges Bernanos. Pantheon. $3.00.

Magister Ludi is a book of wonders. As far as I know, this is the first time that speculative intelligence has been given freedom in a work of fiction. It therefore has nothing in common with the theatrical philosophizing which, in all writers but Dostoevsky, has made up the so-called "novel of ideas." Hesse does not try to deduce characters from ideas, or vice versa, but dispenses with characterization altogether. Joseph Knecht, the hero, has the kind of existence that is given to philosophers by historians of culture: he stands at a point of intersection or convergence of lines of thought. Hesse absolutely commits himself to this conception of character; I was unable to believe it. I kept waiting throughout the novel for something "to happen," the usual conversion of character into drama. "Nothing happens"; and that which does not happen turns out to be a departure from the conventional novel, at a slow pace, creeping at times and even standing dead still, that goes at least as far as *Ulysses* though not, unfortunately, in as interesting a way.

The scene is somewhere in Europe, some time in the future, after the Age of the Digest, our own, which had all but destroyed culture, and whose wars had devastated the earth. To preserve the humane tradition, a number of scholars have joined together to found Castalia, a realm separate from the ordinary world, but dependent on it for subsistence. No one in Castalia works at practical things. The life, which with the exception of a period in youth is chaste and unworldly, is completely given over to a study of the various cultural traditions, including the Chinese, and of the development of the forms in music, poetry, mathematics, philosophy, etc. The work is scholarly, never creative. Its highest expression is achieved in the Bead Game, which lends itself to a refinement in subtlety as profound as chess, though it is played not with pieces (there are however beads to manipulate as well as hieroglyphics and other symbols) but with concepts. A theme, of music,

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poetry, science or any such field is stated and elaborated, through meditation and in accordance with the rules of the game, to embrace other themes, until the game throws a net of formal relations over the whole history of culture. Joseph Knecht reaches proficiency in this game, becoming a Magister Ludi. The story of his life is the story of his intellectual adventures which Hesse, writing in the person of a Castalian, relates with few biographical details. The suggestion of an eventual breakthrough of repressed sexuality and worldliness is faintly established at the beginning; and though Hesse goes so far as to refer to Knecht's secret inner life as one of *Sturm und Drang*, he remains faithful to the Castalian tone in which one speaks only of mind, and does not exploit the opportunity for drama. Instead of drama we are given the Bead Game, and its marvellously happy symbolism is worked through over and over again to present the life of the mind. Fiction is thrown away in the process; but to say so is not a judgment on this novel, which makes no attempts at fiction.

But the break-through comes, and at that point Hesse, who has been writing in the tradition of Kafka (a qualification will follow), leans on Thomas Mann. Joseph Knecht, at the top of his career, leaves Castalia and enters the world as the tutor of the young son of his half-Castalian friend, Plinio Designori. He meets death, as does Aschenbach, in the form of the-young-boy-in-the-water. But here again, the dramatic theme is not developed, and the homosexual meaning not given openly. Here Hesse's restraint appears as disdain: as though drama were somehow not quite nice, and ordinary psychology not pure enough, to appear at the death of the mind.

Call this a weakness. But *Magister Ludi* has an extraordinary intellectual strength and simplicity. Its greatest quality is an implicit literary criticism, a program, as it were, for writers to follow. Apparently acknowledging the tradition of Kafka as supreme for our time (for he takes his initial premise of the world from the same perspective), Hesse makes an adaptation of it that amounts to a radical transvaluation. It is not by accident that his hero is named Joseph Knecht (Joseph K.) and that his world is called Castalia. But there is no difficulty in arriving at Castalia, it is an accessible part of the world: the doors of the Castle stand wide open. *The Castle* has been rewritten from the interior point of view, the terror of God vanishes, and all suggestion of anything obscene in the exercise of His will, anything incommensurate with man's. A vocation exists always with reference to a world ordered by Law and prepared to fulfill it, and though the Law is still oppressive, it is fundamentally rational. It can be understood, mastered; as one rises in the

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understanding of it one becomes no longer a plaything but a member of the bureaucracy. One's bondage to the Law increases with this mastery (*Knecht* means servant, slave), but the entrance to the Law affords a two-way passage; Hesse, taking literally Kafka's fable in *The Trial* about the door to the Law which stands open the whole of a man's life, answers it with the charmingly simple-minded observation that one can also walk out. Joseph Knecht leaves Castalia with no more trouble than he entered. *Magister Ludi* is a translation of Kafka into the tradition of philosophical naturalism. And while this is done ironically—the scholars and bureaucrats of this well-lighted Castle are after all concerned only with a game—Hesse's irony, it seems to me, is not meant to detract from his optimistic recommendation in the spirit of enlightenment: enter the Castle, make yourselves at home.

Moravia's novel starts at the other end of the scale, taking its metaphor from the body. The Woman of Rome is Adriana, who finds her vocation in being a whore. She has a great natural capacity for it, and is the only character in this novel, as well as any other recent one I can think of, who is able to love. The drama of her life is not, as in Knecht's, unachieved by the author; but it is unnecessary, as are also the self-conscious intellectual insights Moravia never rests from trying to add to it: an existentialist sense of being alive, which as it is a tenuous sense, is ludicrously out of place in a full-bodied woman. Moravia lacks the courage of his sensuality, he does not let it stand as such, a poem, its own being, self-augmenting. He worries Adriana, constantly intervening, in his own voice spoken through her mouth, to school her sensibility. Yet if she has love's capacity, if in the sexual embrace she holds all of life, what need has she to sound like Sartre?

Adriana is sheer overflow, the novel cannot hold her. Moravia, hurriedly throwing up action to keep her in the story, only makes her nature seem so much the more tide-like, "undramatic." He leads her into an entanglement with a schizoid student, Mino, whom she loves and a brutal murderer, Sonzogno, who, of all her lovers, is the only man to possess her completely. Left to herself Adriana, I have the feeling, would not have stood these men; she would have rejected the humiliation Mino imposed on her, and as for Sonzogno, far from being fascinated by his horrible depravity and by the thought of being owned by it, she would have laughed in his face, for he is a pretentious idiot. Overevaluation of the murderer is a mistake, not of the lover, but of the serious novelist who raises the scent of the dramatic moment: meanings must spill out like blood. But love can afford to be lighthearted, it can do with-

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[illegible] meanings. To add an existential dimension to Adriana, whose [illegible] is not sickness or life but health, is to diminish and finally [illegible] to her the fact that she's a whore.

Both these novels are clear in their ruling metaphors of mind and body. Neither succeeds in extending the metaphor dramatically to [illegible] or including the other—*Magister Ludi* is sexless and *The Woman* [illegible] fails under an extraneous philosophy. It is to the achievement [illegible] synthesis, one that may be called spirit, that brought Bernanos [illegible] in *Under the Sun of Satan*, the story of a [illegible] Father Donissan, who attains sainthood. The [illegible] height of spirit in virtue of his struggles to live with the [illegible] intellectual issues are furnished by the tradition of Christianity [illegible] its uneasy equilibrium of faith and reason, set askew in [illegible] loss of faith. But the issues at either side of spirit, at least in the context of this novel, are mediocre when not false. Father Donissan's spirituality reduces itself, rather shamefacedly, to the fact that he [illegible] a woman—for which we are expected to admire him, and also for the [illegible] he mortifies himself, with hairshirt and chain. The intellectual [illegible] issues, mostly straps, are supplied by the author, for Donissan is not [illegible] pedant, and consist in a disdain of "neuropsychology" which [illegible] with his behavior by its right name—and a belief in the reality of the devil, who appears to him in the flesh. His struggles are the [illegible] agony of pride: mortification, leading to greater pride, [illegible], a greater mortification, etc., *ad inf.* This hero's behavior [illegible] holiness. I shall forego the obvious psychological objection, the [illegible] tion is just as strong. There is a vindictive pessimism in the [illegible] of perversions and absurdities. *Credo quia absurdum est* has come to mean, to hell with science, to hell with learning, to hell with truth—I believe! There is no cheaper way of buying salvation, but its price is appalling. Little wonder that one after another, [illegible] writers are reviving Lucifer—I presume, for moral support.

But here is a paradox. *Magister Ludi* and *The Woman of Rome* are well grounded in reasonable conceptions, their metaphors of mind and body are controlled with skill, taste, sophistication, both are good books—Hesse's is even a great book—but they are inferior as novels. *Under the Sun of Satan* is an abuse of intelligence, its issues are stale, its conception of spirit, perverse—but it is superior as dramatic fiction. As though a novelist cannot afford to be too sure of his ground. This may be the case, for Bernanos seems to thrive on a lack of confidence. He patterns his conflicts after Dostoevsky even to the detail of hoping to

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arrive at and sustain a faith which will justify his perversity. Meanwhile, he lacks the ultimate faith to which he has committed himself, and because he is always slipping and falling down in his pursuit of it, he must grasp at anything that will steady him. He takes hold with greater force than a writer who has a matter well in hand; and so he clutches at scene, word, monologue, everything is pressed to the limit, and dramatic effectiveness is implicit in the very pressure of the act of writing. But is it worth it? Mere fiction cannot justify this deliberate poverty of spirit, a bore, a nuisance, and ultimately a vicious thing.

But Hesse's invasion of the Castle, as a mere stroke of imagination, even if it fails, Moravia's single creation of a real woman of flesh, have a greater dramatic potential than Bernanos' fever and delirium. Health, naturalism, the joy of love, the preservation of secular culture, these small and still very shy little devotions to enlightenment shall have to provide the dominant movement of fiction if drama is to mean a real adventure, not a crack-up, of spirit. The road, let us say, has been opened to the Castle. The way is long (even if one does simply walk in, as with Hesse), and who knows what can happen on the way? And picture the excitement—it will be the greatest dramatic moment in literature—if one finds on opening the door that Adriana has already moved in and lies there waiting on her sacred couch.

Isaac Rosenfeld

AN EMANCIPATOR FREES HIMSELF

THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH. By André Gide. Alfred Knopf. $3.00.

It is extraordinary that one of Gide's most influential works, *Les Nourritures Terrestres,* first published in 1897, and its pendant, *Les Nouvelles Nourritures,* conceived about 1916 and published in 1935, should not reach American readers until 1949. The fact that they have finally done so is matter for rejoicing, for these little books are strikingly different from anything else by Gide which is so far available in English, except possibly some of *The Immoralist* and a few rhapsodic passages of the *Journal.* Manuals of joy, of self-abandonment, of intoxication with life, they are the least literary, least self-conscious, most spontaneous things he has done. His claim to the continuing attention of the next century or so might well be based most firmly on *The Fruits of the Earth* and the *Journal,* for these books, almost alone among his output, are completely successful in their line.

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The line of *The Fruits of the Earth*—the two titles mean, literally, Earthly Food and New Food—is that of the prose poem as a medium of personal confession, not of sins but of enthusiasms, of intensely treasured states of soul and body. (Both books contain verse as well as prose, but, as in Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer,* the verse is imbedded in the prose.) The 1897 volume, the work of a man well under thirty, some of it composed during the first zest of marriage, breathes restless desire, a joyful awareness and love of growth, of "becoming what you are," in Goethe's phrase. "But here I will speak to you only of *things*—not of THE INVISIBLE REALITY, for . . . as the most wondrous seaweed grows lusterless when it is taken out of the water, so . . . etc." A typical sentence, unfinished, agitated, impassioned, with but a trace of the unsureness, the self-questioning which characterize so much of Gide's later work. It was this very positiveness and forthrightness, so startling in the analytical atmosphere of the turn of the century, that made the rarer spirits of two generations take *Les Nourritures Terrestres* to heart, succumbing, in the crucial pre- and post-war years, to ideas which their defenders called aids to self-realization and their detractors branded as invitations to irresponsibility. Here, in an engagingly pure form, are to be found many of the doctrines because of which Gide was and doubtless always will be regarded in some quarters as a poisoner of youth. "Never *stay* anywhere, Nathaniel. . . . There is no greater danger for you than *your own* family, *your own* room, *your own* past."—"Every new thing should always find the whole of us wholly available."—Principles whose force sprang in large part from the vivid terms in which they were presented—an account of a credible and understandable experience, Gide's release from the restraints of a strict, somewhat puritanical upbringing. (Perhaps there was something to be said, after all, for those stern nineteenth-century disciplines. "It feels so nice when it stops," said the lunatic who kept hitting himself on the head with a hammer.)

Here indeed is a book which "speaks only of things"—things seen and felt as with new-born senses, life lived as with newly acquired faculties. By suggestion and comment, seldom by direct narration, but always with an undertone of progress, the eight sections of *Les Nourritures Terrestres* tell a story of sensual and emotional growth in concretely projected settings—Italy, Normandy, Tunisia—as well as in the inner landscape of the imagination, which is the chief scene of *The New Fruits,* although there too external happenings are interspersed with meditative raptures. The naturalness of the earlier book, celebrating with equal eloquence the delights of writing verses and of being shaved by a good Neapolitan barber, feeling a breeze with your eyelids and sensing

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the omnipresence of God, is what prevents it from seeming as remote from our hard-boiled age as do some other formulations of the aesthetic attitude, more elegant and elaborate than Gide's but close to it in time and spirit, such as those of Ruskin, Pater, Wilde and the early Proust. The timeless liveliness of the 1897 volume can be traced ultimately—as is the case with all of Gide's books—to its dissatisfaction with the experiences it embodies. You feel at the end of it that only a beginning has been made, that the poet—for Gide is a poet here, or as close as he ever came to being one—has exhausted the possibilities, for him, of this phase and is moving on to another. *Passer outre,* to go beyond, is a central phrase of his writing. But here the dissatisfaction is pristine, the discontent has the bloom of youth on it; and it carries more conviction, for that reason, than the relatively serene disquiet of *The New Fruits* forty years after.

Dorothy Bussy's translation of these books, in which Gide's prose is at its most sinuous, reflects that quality, and the spare, nervous virility which underlies it, with a sensitivity to French nuances and English cadence which is absolutely faultless. This triumph of a cruelly demanding and seldom appreciated craft matches the many miracles of thought and language here performed by a master of the art of writing.

Frank Jones

POETRY CHRONICLE

THE EDGE OF BEING. By Stephen Spender. Random House. $2.50.
THANATOPSIS. By Herbert Cahoon. The Tiger's Eye. New York. $4.00.

In his latest poetry, Stephen Spender still seems to be trying to make the same complex of emotions and ideas with which he began some fifteen years ago come alive, despite the fact that, on the whole, it is less able to absorb contemporary experience than it was then. There are some changes. Marx has been eased out of the old Lawrence-Freud-Marx synthesis and a kind of ectoplasmic religiosity substituted with no indication of how the transition was accomplished. The atmosphere of historic salvation through a biologic and spiritual rebirth is still present, but failure—instead of anticipated triumph—is now so much in the foreground that most of the finely rhapsodic, if rather adolescent, effects have disappeared. The effort to unite lyric fervor with a metaphysics of life, love and identity continues with a marked increase in emotive power while the diseriminations have become, for the most part, confused echoes of former perceptions:

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To steel the will against awareness would banish
The angel who arrives each instant
From the horrific flesh;
Who warns that power, fear, agony are the life under many;
That the real is the terrible; that to deny
This unsheathes tyranny.

The fear and the agony and Mr. Spender's experience of it are much more real in this passage than they are in his early work; the emotion behind the poem is stronger and almost sufficient to compensate for its defects. As in most of these poems, Mr. Spender is trying desperately to maintain his sincerity at the expense of his sense of language, and indeed, of sense, in general. The warning against excesses of volition is an avant-garde moral saw that is by now as startling as "honesty is the best policy" and a good deal less clear, for we do not know exactly what we are being admonished to avoid. Is "awareness" meant to be an attribute of will, which we can separate from it by "steeling"? And what faculty does the steeling? If Mr. Spender means that one can force one's mind by an act of will to concentrate on other aspects of life and knowledge and thereby reduce the awareness of human feeling, the only intelligible meaning I can fit into the context, he has taken good care not to say so.

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Mr. Spender's language at present is simpler and stronger than in his earlier work but it is not as inventive or selective (I doubt if the earlier poet would have used a cliché like "steel the will," so shapeless an adjective as "horrific" or allowed the incompatible "power" to be joined to "fear" and "agony"). A tendency to use words without consistency either in their relations to an external world or to each other has increased through lack of correction and also because of Mr. Spender's failure to be content with both the limitations and possibilities of poetry in modern society.

Whatever ultimate relation may prevail between poetry, morality and politics, it does seem clear that at present a poet who would moralize must either discover new moral possibilities or attempt to attract a wider audience than the one for which modern poets habitually write. Instead, Mr. Spender frequently goes into a self-absorbed trance in which he lists his own moral defects and issues his old injunctions to himself. And since he has lost his politics and finds it impossible to live and write without some Messianic function, he has also taken to doing other people's suffering for them, assuming the guilt of the aviators who dropped bombs on Germany and flagellating himself because when he was in pre-Hitler Vienna, he did not suffer enough at the sight of the murderers.

The amazing thing about all this is that Mr. Spender's experience of the catastrophes of contemporary Europe is more deeply felt and poignant than that of any other English poet and he seems to be putting up a great struggle in the depths of his psyche for some kind of truth and purpose, though what its concrete realization would be is hard to say. Covered up as it is by the ragged remnants of the Shelleyan suffering-prophet tradition, often mawkish and clumsy in expression, crossed by a streak of naive schoolboy idealism maintained so long that it has gone a trifle rotten, Mr. Spender's struggle with urgent matters nevertheless gives the verse in "The Edge of Being" a distorted and muffled power that is duplicated nowhere else in contemporary poetry.

Mr. Cahoon's poetry is, whether consciously or not I do not know, exquisitely adapted to the contradictions of the poet's current situation. As I see it, most of the old kind of poetic energy is being shut off and no great supply of new energy is available or will be unless something changes inside the poet, the form of poetry or the poet's relation to society. Meanwhile Mr. Cahoon has given us a volume of verse that is about as de-energized as poetry of merit can be, by which I do not mean that it is fatigued but that it is confined, diminished writing from which

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all the bolder and larger effects have been excluded and in which no overtly strenuous effort of any kind is made. They are brief poems, most of the lines containing from three to six syllables, but never conspicuously concise or epigrammatic; the rhythms are the easy conversational kind that usually go with a longer line handled with just enough carefulness and sensitivity to prevent them from registering as lazy or trivial. There are a few scattered passages and a line or two in every poem that are meant to be and often succeed in being, striking; there are also quite a few that are derivative and some that simply do not come off.

The chief thing about Mr. Cahoon's slim volume is that it offers a terrain and an atmosphere in which it is possible to move and breathe and look at objects with a sense of delight because it is all highly individualized and therefore new. And it doesn't have the poet in it, racing about you in circles, telling you what a genius he is, and how much he is suffering and how you should eat, sleep, think, feel and make love. "The Scenes of Earth" is not Mr. Cahoon's best but it is a representative specimen of his talents:

The landscape of a year
Is difficult to reach

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Distance brings it
Through the morning fog
Past noon time
But the hills are hot and dry
Only the ocean moves

There are sea walls and corded monuments
Not pretending to life or design

The blocks and pendulum
Fall in the evening
From a great height
Brighter than meteors

The caged beauty of a saint
Even that is farther
Than we have gone before

W. S. Poster

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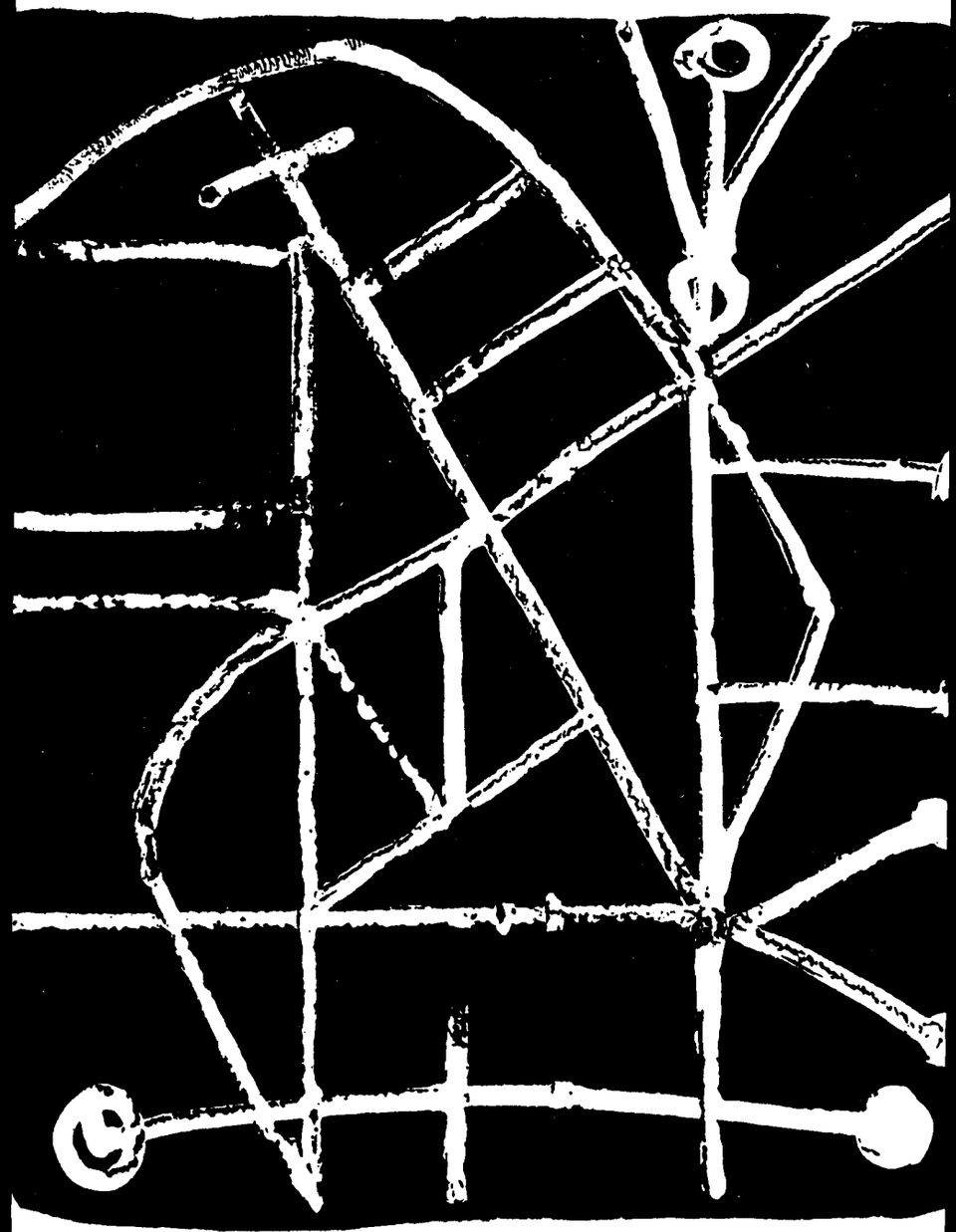

THE READER. Fritz Bultman. 1949.

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